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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

Edited by LESLIE CHARTERIS

The Old Man in the Window
by MARGERY ALLINGHAM

Melody in Death
by BAYNARD KENDRICK

A Gentleman for a Night
by OCTAVUS ROY COHEN

The Ghost of a Dog
by RICHARD SALE

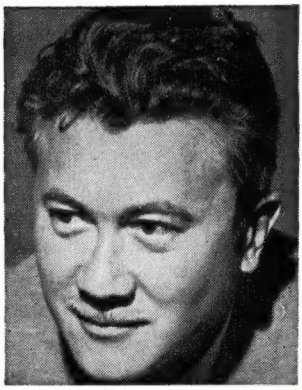
A Present for Christmas
by ROBERT ARTHUR

THE RELUCTANT NUDIST

A NEW SAINT NOVELET by LESLIE CHARTERIS

SOME OLD, SOME NEW — THE FINEST IN MYSTERY FICTION

A KING-SIZE PUBLICATION



TRUE TO OUR IMPARTIAL POLICY of favoring our personal friends whenever we have the chance, we are featuring this month MELODY IN DEATH, a short novel by Baynard Kendrick, starring his famous blind detective Duncan Maclain.

My own friendship with Baynard began more years ago than either of us might want to remember, through the pages of the late great *Black Mask* magazine, which published many adventures of another of his notable creations, Miles Standish Rice—and one day we hope to revive some of those stories for you too. I can think of one other blind detective in fiction (Max Carrados, created by the late Ernest Bramah) but I think Baynard is the only writer of this kind whose interest in blindness came from once temporarily having experienced it himself—an interest which also inspired him to write a more serious novel on the subject, LIGHTS OUT, and to have donated so much of his spare time to working for and with the blinded casualties of the last war.

Another first-timer in this magazine is Margery Allingham, with THE OLD MAN IN THE WINDOW. Miss Allingham is unquestionably one of the deans (or should it be duennas?) of mystery writing; and though I can't claim her as a personal friend, I did once meet her at a party, which there is no reason for her to remember, for my name meant nothing whatever at that time. But I hope this is only the first of many meetings inside these covers.

Along with these debuts, we celebrate just as enthusiastically the return of two old favorites. Octavus Roy Cohen's fat and fabulous Jim Hanvey, and Richard Sale's irrepressible Daffy Dill, are neither of them strangers in this book; and in A GENTLEMAN FOR A NIGHT and THE GHOST OF A DOG, respectively, they are both at their best.

For those who expect some seasonal reading about this time of year, A PRESENT FOR CHRISTMAS, by TV's well-known Robert Arthur, builds up to one of the most effective twists on Santa Claus that I can remember.

But whatever I say about the other stories this month, I'm afraid there is little doubt that the one you will all read first is THE RELUCTANT NUDIST. I only wish I could kid myself that this was a tribute to my superb literary craftsmanship, instead of the depravity of your appetites. Especially after all the hard work I put in last summer, doing the research for the story. I didn't invent the island where it happens, you know. I just want you to appreciate the hardships I go through to bring you only the most authentic backgrounds.

Ellery Queen

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By RICHARD JOHNS

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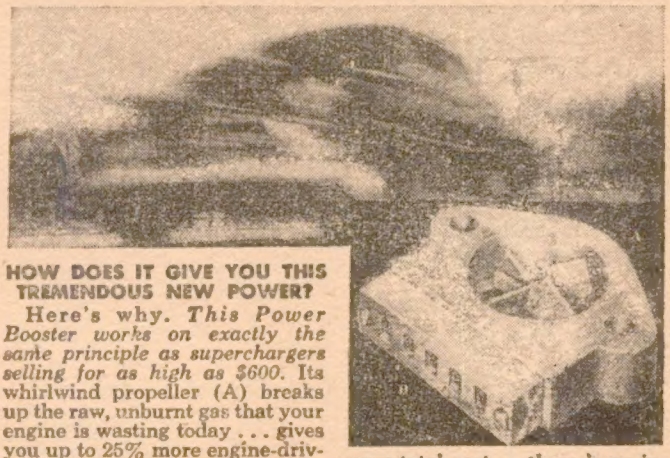

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THE saint DETECTIVE MAGAZINE

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THE SAINT DETECTIVE MAGAZINE, Vol. 5, No. 1. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Ave., N. Y. 22, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, N. Y., N. Y.
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Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. LHZ, Beltone Hearing Aid Co., 400 Madison Avenue, New York 17, New York.

the reluctant nudist

by . . . Leslie Charteris

To Mr. Oddington civilization was a bitter mockery. But Simon knew that the deadliest of serpents may lie hidden in a nudist Eden.

"WHEN DO you start taking your clothes off?" Simon Templar asked, with a faint hint of malice.

George McGeorge wriggled unhappily inside his pastel blue silk shirt and sharply creased slacks. Between the crown of his stylish Panama and the soles of his immaculate suede shoes, he was almost conspicuously a young man to whom the ministrations of tailor and haberdasher were more than ordinarily important. His rather vapidly good-looking face took on a tinge of pink under its urban pallor.

"Not before everyone else does, anyway," he said.

"Never mind about anyone else," Simon persisted. "I think it would give Uncle Waldo a big glow to see that you were entering into the spirit of the thing right from the start."

"In that case, he'd be still more bucked if I could introduce you in your birthday suit too, and tell him that I'd even made another convert on the way over."

"That wasn't in the deal, George. I offered to come with you as moral support and as an interested observer—not as a sort

IN A BOLD NEW MYSTERY SAGA, THRILLINGLY CHRONICLED, THE SAINT DEFIES CRIME'S UNDERTOW ON A FABULOUS ISLE.

of trophy. And because it sounded like one of the few places left in the world where I could feel reasonably sure of not getting mixed up in some sort of crime. I'm banking on the idea that nudists couldn't carry around much stuff worth stealing, and that murder is a lot more difficult where it would be such a problem to conceal a weapon."

"The closer I get to it," Mr. McGeorge said darkly, "the more I wish one of 'em would strangle Uncle Waldo."

The Saint grinned, and gazed with tranquil anticipation at the islands spread before the bows of the little ferry. Lying in a corner of the Mediterranean which is still virtually *terra incognita* to the American tourist army, whose Riviera extends no further west than the outskirts of Cannes, they are known to prosy official cartographers as the Iles d'Hyères, but to the more flowery-minded authors of travel brochures as the Golden Isles; while one of them, to a still more specialized public, stands for the closest approximation to the Garden of Eden to be found within the borders of civilization.

For this island of about six miles in length and roughly a mile and a quarter in average width, which is separated by only nine miles of water from the unglamorized but busy little Provençal resort of Le Lavandou, is the beneficiary of an official dispensation which remains unique among the local ordinances of Europe.

"You see," Mr. McGeorge had explained it, "over there it's perfectly legal for anyone—I mean women as well as men—to go around in a sort of triangular fig-leaf effect, and nothing else."

This happened at the bar of the Club at Cavalière, the most exclusive hostelry on that stretch of coast, where they had drifted into one of those usually sterile bar-stool conversations to which this was to prove a notable exception.

"Oh," said the Saint. "A kind of semi-nudist colony."

"Not even semi," the other said. "That's only in the village. When they go swimming, they're allowed to take *everything* off. And the point is, it isn't a colony or a club. It isn't private property, and you don't have to belong to anything or join anything. Anybody can go there."

"Zat is right." Raymond Vidal, proprietor and host of the Club, who had been listening, chimed in with genially expansive corroboration. "It was about nineteen 'undred twenty, zat two docteurs from Paris, name Durville, very serious men, wish to bring people to be cured by ze sun, and zey start to make ze village which zey call Héliopolis. And so zat ze patient can get ze

most sun wiz ze least clozing, zey arrange a *tolérance* from ze Commune of Hyères, so zat no one 'as to wear more zan ze *slip minimum.* But it is all quite open. It is very beautiful, very natural. You should go zaire and see it."

"I have to go there," said Mr. McGeorge, with no echo of enthusiasm, "to see my uncle."

He looked like a young man who should have an uncle—preferably one with a considerable fortune, a strong sense of family responsibility, and no wife or offspring of his own. Without some such source of bounty, one would only have felt sorry about his prospects in a callously competitive world. He was the first specimen that Simon had encountered in many years of a type that he had thought was virtually extinct—the spoiled butterfly of good family, a good education which had left no mark on anything but his accent, of ingenuous snobbery, impeccable manners, cultivated indolence, a gift for fairly amusing and decorative frivolity, and absolutely no conception of a world which did not revolve around the smartest clubs, the most fashionable resorts, and the most glittering parties.

The Saint signed to the bartender for some more Peter Dawson.

"Tell me about this uncle," he begged, with fascinated sympathy.

"He lives there," said McGeorge, in the same tone in which he might have admitted that his uncle was addicted to cheating at cards.

Mr. Waldo Oddington, Simon learned, patiently probing for information as he would have extracted morsels of succulence from the shell of a cracked crab, was the brother of McGeorge's mother, and by this time McGeorge's only surviving kin. Brother and sister had been deeply attached to each other, in spite of Mr. Oddington's lieflong record of eccentricities; and one of the late Mrs. McGeorge's last injunctions to her son had been that he should never forget that blood was thicker than water, and that in his veins the Oddington strain of fluid was a full fifty per cent represented.

George McGeorge had dutifully tried to live up to this, encouraging his uncle to regard him almost as the son which Mr. Oddington, a bachelor, had never begotten for himself; although one gathered that this had been no easy task for a young man of Mr. McGeorge's highly developed respect for certain conventions.

"He's spent his life getting one bee after another in his bonnet. He's had a fling at vegetarianism, theosophy, yoga, folk

dancing, and trying to live in a tree. Of course, he started going to nudist camps years ago. Then finally he heard about this Ile du Levant. Naturally he had to go and see it; and he's been living there ever since. At last he's found the one place where he can lead what he calls a normal civilized life and never needs to put any clothes on even to go out and buy a stamp. That would be fine as far as I'm concerned, if only he hadn't asked me to visit him."

"Do you have to go?"

"I've put it off as long as I can, but I can't make it so obvious that I'd hurt the old codger's feelings. That's one thing I'm determined to avoid."

Simon could well understand that the feelings of a certain class of old codger are customarily treated with the utmost consideration. Not letting it sound too obvious, he remarked: "At least it sounds like a nice inexpensive fad. Or wouldn't that make any difference?"

"Well, he doesn't have to worry too much about money." McGeorge seemed a little embarrassed and anxious to change that subject. "But lately his letters have been full of some French girl who appears to be living with him, and I've wondered if she's thinking of hitching on to a good thing."

"It couldn't be love, could it?"

"It could be, I suppose. But he's over sixty and she's only twenty-five."

"I wouldn't think a guy like that could be sold on anything so conventional as marriage."

"I know. Free Love was another thing that he used to be steamed up about. But you never can tell," Mr. McGeorge said pessimistically. "Anyhow, that's another reason why I thought I'd better go and look things over."

Simon needed no diagrams to visualize the threat that a belated romance could pose to a man in the position to which George McGeorge seemed so perfectly adapted, and he rather admired the other's unashamedly brazen candor.

It was the first time that the Saint, whose years of adventure had taken him to some of the most outlandish reaches of the globe and whose fund of uncommon lore was sometimes astounding in its range, had ever heard of the Ile du Levant and its peculiar tradition; but even for him there could still be something new under the sun, and it was just as likely to be something so close to familiar settings that he might never have noticed it if he had not stubbed his toe on it. Now that he had stumbled on it, a closer look became almost mandatory.

Which was how they came to be sitting side by side on a bench on the good ship *Flèche d'Or,* watching the rugged slopes of

the island loom rapidly nearer over the intense blue water.

The other passengers, some thirty of them on that early run, could mostly be separated without much difficulty into two broad groups. One, which could be distinguished by generally paler skins, a subtle tendency towards superfluities of apparel, and a state of ill-concealed trepidation or excitement, consisted of the inevitable sightseers and perhaps a few tentative recruits. The others, usually marked by a deep tan, a simpler carelessness of costume, and a more earnest or relaxed demeanor, could be picked out with relative certainty as habitués or at least full-fledged initiates.

The Saint, with his bronzed skin, in the cotton shirt and old shorts and espadrilles which he had sensibly chosen to wear, could easily have passed for one of the latter. McGeorge, on the other hand, was easily the most conspicuous example of the first category. Anyone seeing them together would have assumed at once that it was the Saint who had business on the island, and that McGeorge was the one who had decided on the spur of the moment to come along for the ride—and was now vainly regretting the impulse. It was a switch that Simon found highly diverting.

None of the passengers had yet disrobed to any unorthodox extent, but McGeorge did not seem to derive much solace from the delay. His eyes had become fixed on a flattish promontory of rock that stood out a little towards them from the body of the island. On it, tiny figures could be seen lying or strolling and sometimes plunging into the water like seals.

"Would you," McGeorge asked huskily, at last, "say that they had anything on?"

Simon kept his eyes focused as the point drew steadily nearer.

"No," he said at last. "I wouldn't."

"Oh, Lord," said McGeorge, as if right up until that moment he had been clutching a wisp of hope that all the reports about the Ile du Levant might still somehow prove to be a myth.

The ferry headed into the narrow gap between Levant and Port-Cros, and began to swing in towards the eastern island. The captain personally took the wheel again and tooted a cheerful annunciatory blast on the ship's horn, while his fellow Corsairs dispersed efficiently fore and aft to make ready the mooring lines.

The ferry kept turning still more sharply in towards a little cove that opened suddenly ahead of it, with the rusty hull of an old ship sunk across part of the entrance for a breakwater, and the reassuringly normal-looking windows and terrace of a typical

small restaurant overlooking it from a ledge just a short climb above the jetty.

To the right of the port as they approached it the lower slopes were dotted with white and orange glimpses of scores of little tents, and on the rocks below the outlines of basking campers could be made out in just enough detail to establish that they were letting no artificial obstructions come between them and the health-giving rays of the sun.

"Does your uncle live in one of those?" Simon asked, indicating the canvas settlement.

"I'm sure he'd prefer to," said McGeorge glumly. "But he moved all his belongings here, most of them being books, so he had to break down and put a roof over them."

To make his aspect even more incongruous, he was clutching a large and sinister-looking weapon which resembled a cross between an ancient arquebus and something out of a science-fiction armoury. From one end of it protruded the sharp end of a wickedly barbed spear, which the rest of the contraption was apparently designed to propel.

"What *can* you take for a present to a simple-life maniac?" McGeorge had explained plaintively, when he showed up with it at their embarkation. "It seems that about their only entertainment here is swimming around in diving masks and shooting at wretched little fish. So I went to a tackle shop and asked them what was the latest tool for it, and they sold me this beastly thing."

A sizeable and lively congregation stood waiting on the quay. Some of them who were more or less conventionally clothed, but sun-scorched, could be identified by their baggage as visitors who were waiting to end their stay with the return trip of the ferry. The rest were obviously residents and as the distance lessened from yards to feet and eventually to inches, it became eye-fillingly manifest that the majority were fully content with the minuscule G-string confection prescribed for wear within the city limits.

"This is just like landing on one of those South Sea islands you used to read about," Simon remarked, surveying the reception committee with interest. "Only these natives are a hell of a lot better looking."

Mr. McGeorge stood gripped in a kind of paralysis in which only his eyes moved, and they swiveled frantically as if torn between the compulsion to see everything and a terror of being caught staring at anything. But at last they found something that they seemed to feel they could safely rest on.

"There's Uncle Waldo," he croaked.

Simon followed him on to the dock without the slightest foreboding of what that innocent visit was to lead to.

II

Mr. Waldo Oddington was a rather tall wiry man whose age was not too evident even to the extremely complete scrutiny which his nominal garment permitted. His hair, which was scanty, was an indefinite gray; and although his nut-brown body might have been rated on the scrawny side by some esthetic standards, its muscles looked hard and his abdomen was as flat as a board. He wrung his nephew's hand with a vigor that made Mr. McGeorge wince.

"Good to see you, my dear boy! And it's about time. I thought you'd never run out of excuses." His very bright hazel eyes examined McGeorge more closely. "What's the matter with you? Have you just been sick?"

"No, we had a perfectly smooth crossing."

"Then why are you so pale?"

"London, you know," said McGeorge vaguely. "And New York before that."

"Terrible places," pronounced Mr. Oddington. "Millions of imbeciles making themselves neurotic with the noise and bustle, and poisoning themselves with all the fumes they breathe. Why do you think their insanity rate and their lung cancer rate keep rising in almost parallel lines on a graph?"

Not having any ready answer to this, McGeorge somewhat desperately proferred the spear gun he had been holding.

"I brought this along for you, Uncle," he said. "I hope you like it."

"Now that's what I call using your head." Mr. Oddington hefted the weapon and beamed over it like a ten-year-old who has just been presented with the newest model Space Patrol disintegrator. "I really appreciate it, dear boy. We'll try it out this afternoon . . . But I know you've been dying to meet Nadine."

He pushed forward a fair-haired golden-skinned girl who had been standing near him. She smiled, making dimples in a mischievous pretty face.

"How do you do," she said, with only a little accent.

Mr. McGeorge did not look as if he had been dying to meet her, but as if he might well die from doing it. His *savoir faire,* which probably no normal contretemps could have ruffled, was plainly unequal to the requirements of being presented to a shapely young woman who seemed quite unconscious of wearing nothing above the waist. A crimson flush swept over his face, and he groped blindly for her outstretched hand with his eyes

fixed glazedly on a point just over the top of her head.

As hastily as possible, he turned to grab the Saint's arm, as if it had frantically occurred to him that Simon might escape.

"I'd like you to meet a friend of mine—Mr. Templar. I brought him with me. I hope you don't mind."

"Delighted!" Mr. Oddington surveyed the Saint's lean broad-shouldered lines with undisguised approval. "You look very fit, sir. I'm sure we'll have a lot in common. And you must meet Mademoiselle Zeult."

Simon shook hands with the girl, without especially restricting himself on where he looked. It seemed to him that she was no more displeased than any fully clothed woman would have been who sensed that her figure was being admired.

"Well, we don't have to stand around here," Mr. Oddington said briskly. "I expect you're dying to get out of those clothes."

"Oh, no," said McGeorge faintly. "I mean, we're in no hurry. I mean, if there's anything else you want to do—"

"We have to pick up a few groceries in the village; but that's on our way. And of course, you'll want to buy your slips."

"Our what?"

"These things." Mr. Oddington indicated his own peculiarly tailored kind of sporran.

"We don't really need those, do we?" McGeorge said.

"I'm afraid you do. It's strictly against the law to go around the village stark naked. Damned nonsense, I think; but there it is."

"I mean, I've already got trousers, and Templar's got shorts—"

"You don't want to be taken for tourists and have everyone *staring* at you, do you?" asked Mr. Oddington incredulously.

He shepherded them away up a narrow deeply rutted road along which some of the crowd were already dispersing, while others were stringing out along a footpath that led along the shore in the direction of the clustered tents. The road curved up the hill without any serious attempt at easing its slant.

"How far do we have to go?" McGeorge asked.

"It's only half a mile from the port to the village center, and my place is just a little further up."

Mr. Oddington's stringy legs maintained a remarkably youthful pace, and his bare feet did not even seem to notice the stony roughness of the slope on which McGeorge frequently stumbled in his elegant shoes. But when McGeorge fell behind, Nadine Zeult moved in front of him, looking from that angle as if she were wearing nothing whatever except a piece of string. The Saint saw McGeorge shudder

and turn on a panicky burst of speed that took him safely ahead of the sight; and Simon found himself walking beside the girl.

"How long have you been here?" he asked, to make conversation.

"Since May, this year. Is it your first time here?"

"Yes."

"I came first in August last year, only because a boy I was with wanted to see it, and I have been here ever since. Perhaps you will be the same."

"It's a little early to think about that," Simon murmured.

"I think you will enjoy it." She looked at McGeorge's back, to which the shirt was already clinging sweatily. "But I do not think Mr. Oddington's nephew will. Do you know him well?"

"As a matter of fact, I hardly know him at all."

"They are not a bit alike. I can tell. Already I'm wondering why Mr. Oddington is so fond of him," she said with astonishing frankness.

Before Simon could decide on a suitable answer, Mr. Oddington announced: "Here we are. This is Héliopolis!"

A stranger might not have recognized it at once as the village center if he had not been told. Since leaving the shadow of the restaurant that overlooked the harbor, they had passed signs indicating other restaurants and hotels, and a shop, on other equally rough roads that branched off to their left to follow the contours of the hill and which doubtless served the villas which had been more visible from the sea.

Now there was only a very slightly increased concentration of commercial activity: a few yards above another restaurant and bar which they had just passed there was a grocery store on the right, and opposite that a stall festooned with an indeterminate variety of merchandise ranging from pottery to postcards.

Mr. Oddington led the way into the grocery store, where he and Nadine chatted and chaffered with sociable lengthiness over the purchase of a disproportionately small quantity of victuals. The proprietor and his wife, Simon noticed, were completely and conventionally clad, but entirely uninterested in the condition of their customers. When the goods had been collected in a string bag, and the total added up on the margin of an old newspaper, Mr. Oddington opened a horizontal zipper near the upper margin of his *cache-sexe*.

George McGeorge, who now had a rosy flush from no other cause than the exertion of the recent climb, at this point reversed his system of color changes and turned pale. Mr. Oddington, unaware of having

provoked any consternation, extracted from the unzippered pocket a tightly folded wad of paper money, counted out enough to cover his bill, replaced the remainder together with his change, and calmly zipped the pocket up again.

"After all, George," Simon observed reasonably, "even in this Garden of Eden they use money, and where else *could* he have a pocket?"

Mr. Oddington picked up the string bag and herded his party across the street. He waved an expansive hand towards a string of fragments of fancifully printed cotton hanging over the proscenium of the stall, which at first glance would have been taken for a row of ornamental pennants.

"Now," he said, with a twinkle that was faintly suggestive of a challenge, "you can choose your minimums."

The young woman behind the counter leaned forward to spread out a wider choice of patterns. Simon selected for himself a scrap of cotton print with an interesting motif of bees and flowers and the built-in zippered pocket whose utility he had seen demonstrated, and resolved that for McGeorge's benefit he would wear it as if he had been doing it all his life.

Mr. Oddington glanced around to reassemble his flock, and Simon discovered that Nadine was no longer with them. He saw her in a moment, across the street, talking to a young man of about her own age, who kept looking across at them. The young man had rather long well-oiled black hair and the build of a Greek statue; from the way he posed, and the rather spoiled set of his handsome face, one got an instant impression that he had familiarized himself with all his own natural assets in a great many mirrors.

"Nadine," Mr. Oddington called, somewhat peremptorily.

The girl smiled and waved back.

"Go on—I'll catch up with you."

Mr. Oddington frowned, but led the way up the hill to the left. They climbed for a few more minutes, then turned down a still narrower side road.

"If you're so fond of swimming, Uncle Waldo," McGeorge said, with a slight edge in his voice, "why don't you live near the water?"

"Much better view up here," Mr. Oddington said cheerfully. "And it's wonderful exercise walking back and forth."

He suddenly ducked down a winding path through a thicket of oleanders, and in another moment they were at the back door of a house. He opened it without recourse to a key, and they entered a little vestibule with an open kitchen on one side. Mr.

Oddington stopped there to put down his string bag of provisions and transfer some of them to the refrigerator.

"I see you don't object to some modern conveniences," Simon remarked.

"Why should I?" said Mr. Oddington. "Science offers good things and bad things impartially. The test of intelligence is to take the good things and not feel that that obligates you to accept everything. Some people here have their own electric plants, but I get along nicely with bottled gas.

He took them through an archway on the other side of the vestibule into the living room. It had a bare tile floor, bookshelves lining two walls, a desk with a typewriter, and a few cane chairs. Opposite the archway, big French windows stood open on to a terrace beyond which there was indeed a fabulous view over the sapphire sea, with a corner of Port-Cros at one side and the coast of the mainland in the distance.

Mr. Oddington steered them off to the right into a short passageway, where he exhibited a tiled bathroom on one side and two small bedrooms on the other, both of them with french windows on to the same terrace that ran along the whole front of the villa. The bedrooms contained a spartan minimum of furniture, but they did have beds.

"Don't you sleep on the floor any longer, Uncle?" McGeorge inquired.

"Nadine pointed out to me that even birds build nests and line them with feathers," Mr. Oddington said. "I have been giving her argument a fair trial, and so far I have felt no ill effects."

They went on out to the terrace and gazed at the panorama.

"How did you meet this girl?" McGeorge asked.

"Well," Mr. Oddington said, almost as if their relationship had been reversed, "I hate having to clean house, and also I needed someone to help me with the typing on my book—"

"What book?"

"I am writing a book about everything I have discovered which will enable anyone to live to be hale and hearty at a hundred. Of course, I won't be able to publish it with real authoritativeness until I'm a hundred myself, but that gives me another thirty-six years to get all my facts and principles systematized."

"I see. But how did you find Nadine?"

"I stuck an advertisement on the bulletin board at the *Mairie,* and she happened to see it. She was only over for the day, but the place had got her—it does that to some people, you know, like love at first sight, when they

realize that there's something here that they've always unconsciously wanted. But to stay here for more than a short holiday, she had to be able to earn a living. It was Fate, of course—a perfect example of it. She came to see me, and I liked her at once."

"But you told me yourself that it was more than a business arrangement."

"Later on, yes. She's a very attractive girl, as you've seen for yourself by this time, and the idea that a man of over sixty is practically decrepit has only been built up by burlesque comedians on the strength of the type of specimens they see in their audience. I think we shall have a very happy marriage."

The Saint, who had been leaning on the balustrade and trying to look as though he were politely ignoring the conversation, turned in time to see McGeorge flinch as if he had taken a tap in the solar plexus.

"You haven't done this already?"

"No, but we were only waiting till you could be here. After all, you're the only family I have."

"It's as serious as that, is it?"

"You know my views about motherhood for women. I certainly mustn't deprive Nadine of such a vital function. And to complete my studies of every phase of the natural life, I should have the experience of being a father."

Whether McGeorge would have found a ready answer to that remained unsettled, for he still seemed to be recovering from a state of shock when Nadine Zeult herself came out from the living-room to join them.

"You are all so serious," she said, taking them in with her impish amber eyes. "That is what always happens when men are left alone."

"You were the one who left us," Mr. Oddington said, his mouth tightening irritably as at an unfortunately revived recollection.

The girl laughed, and went over to cuddle his arm and kiss him on the cheek.

"You are pretending to be jealous, Waldo," she said blithely, "and it makes you adorable. Now I am here, what do you want us to do?"

Mr. Oddington graciously allowed himself to recover his good humor while portentously studying a sundial set in a stone table permanently built into the terrace.

"We've used up so much of the morning that it's hardly worth going to the beach now," he said. "Let's have an early lunch and go for a swim afterwards."

"I will bring you a drink when I fix it."

The girl left, and came back in a few minutes with a bottle of St-Raphaël and three glasses with ice in them. Lunch was a much better meal than he had expected. There was a minestrone so thick with vegetables and so heavily crusted with grated cheese that it was almost as satisfying as a meat stew, and a pilaff of rice and peanuts and mushrooms with a smothering of fried onions that was surprisingly tasty.

"I shall now take a siesta for exactly half an hour," announced Mr. Oddington, when they had all helped with the dishes. "One day some pompous nincompoop of a physician will get himself a great reputation by officially prescribing what the Mediterranean people have always done by instinct."

Simon found himself in the other bedroom, taking off his shirt, while George McGeorge sat and watched him morosely.

"Well, Templar, what do you think?"

"Me?" said the Saint. "I love your Uncle Waldo. He's probably one of the few completely happy people in this complicated world. He's found his Bali Hai."

"And the girl to go with it," McGeorge said. "I heard her telling you on the way up, about how she came here the first time with a boy friend. And you saw the gigolo type she was talking to in the village, and the way Uncle Waldo felt about it. How much would you like to bet that that isn't the same boy friend? And that they haven't had everything figured out all along?"

Simon pursed his lips.

"Yes, I had thought about that. I can see why it would bother you."

"Don't think I'm just going to sit still and let it happen," McGeorge said.

His habitually weary and rather querulous voice had such a cold-blooded intensity that the Saint realized for the first time, with an odd thrill of indefinable apprehension, how seriously he might have mis-estimated that effete and stuffy young man.

III

The walk to the beach at Rioufrède was mostly downhill, across the central intersection of Héliopolis and down a road that started at right angles to the one they had trudged up from the port, so that Mr. Oddington's energetic pace was easy even for McGeorge's unconditioned legs to keep up with.

Mr. Oddington, whose siesta seemed to give him the fire to start an afternoon as if it were a whole new day, drew their attention to the rusty barbed wire on one side of the road and an occasional faded sign posted behind it, and held forth tren-

chantly about the recent invasion by the Fench Navy and its attempt to take over the whole island as a base for guided missile experiments, and the stubborn struggle of the residents to retain their foothold on the island.

"Bureaucracy's the same everywhere. As if they didn't have half the Sahara desert doing no good to anyone, this was the only place they could pick on to play with their stupid toys. But they got a surprise when they found that they'd stirred up a hornets' nest!"

From the pugnacious thrust of jaw that went with that, Simon added to his observations the awareness that Mr. Oddington was capable of fully as much stubborn aggressiveness as his nephew had unexpectedly revealed, and the new-born conviction grew on him that the inevitable conflict might not be pretty at all.

Presently they turned off the road, down a well-worn footpath to the right. The path started mildly, grew rapidly steeper, and finally became precipitous. When it was little more than a goat-track slanting down the side of a cliff, the stunted bushes thinned out to unmask the first sudden view of the cove it was leading down into. It was a deep little bay enclosed between two steep slopes of rock, hardly big enough to contain a football field, and reaching back to a broad crescent of pebbly beach.

There were half a dozen heads bobbing in the water and three or four dozen people lying or sitting or walking about on the beach; and the actuality of their freedom from inhibition, which could be basically established at the first glance, was a momentary jolt even to the Saint. He thought it was merciful for McGeorge that the condition of the path made it extremely hazardous for the eyes to wander for most of the remainder of the descent.

But that took no longer than a few flights of stairs, and then they were down on the beach themselves, with the astonishing display of epidermis all around them.

"Well, now we can make ourselves comfortable," said Mr. Oddington.

And, untying the string, he stepped gratefully out of his irksome habiliment.

"Aren't you coming for a swim, George?" he demanded. "You look dopey. It'll wake you up."

"It still isn't quite a full hour since we finished lunch," said McGeorge, clutching even at that swiftly vanishing straw.

"Nonsense," scoffed Mr. Oddington. "An old superstition. Look at seals. They swim *while* they're eating."

McGeorge somehow managed

to refrain from mentioning that he was not a seal.

"I—I'm not so used to the sun as the rest of you," he pleaded. "I don't think I should have too much all at once. Besides"—he grabbed at another inspiration—"we've still got lots of things to talk about."

"We'll have the whole evening for that, my boy."

"The last ferry leaves at five, doesn't it?"

"But you weren't thinking of going back today, were you?"

"Obviously. You know we didn't bring any luggage."

"I thought you might have a toothbrush in your pocket. You'd know I could lend you a razor. You knew that we didn't wear clothes here. What on earth would you put in your luggage?" asked Mr. Oddington, in devastating perplexity.

The Saint had been gazing around, inventorying details of the general scene with unabashed interest and studiously keeping aloof from the argument. At that moment his eyes came to rest on the statuesque figure of a man standing on a ledge of rock about thirty feet up the trail down which they had recently scrambled, staring steadily down at them.

Simon recognized him at once as the self-satisfied Adonis whom Nadine had been talking to in the village. It seemed unnecessarily imaginative to assume that the man had followed them there, but the Saint automatically re-scanned the walk through his mind like a film and confirmed that he had not had any occasion to look back. However, it would probably have been equally easy for anyone who knew Mr. Oddington's habits to foresee where he would go in the afternoon.

"I feel like talking now, Uncle Waldo," McGeorge said stubbornly.

He put on the shirt which he had brought with him and sat down firmly, with his knees drawn up, huddling the shirt around him like a small tent.

Mr. Oddington glanced wistfully at the new spear-gun which he had brought along with him. His jaw tightened; and then, surprisingly, he also sat down.

"All right, George, if that's how you feel. We'll talk a bit."

Simon could not tell who else had seen the man on the rocks above.

Nadine Zeult touched his arm.

"Will you come for a swim with me?" she suggested tactfully.

A little triangle of cloth fluttered down on to the beach as she ran into the water.

The Saint ran in after her. Much as he would have given to find an excuse to stay and listen, there was nothing else he could do about it. He stumbled into a plunging dive and

swam violently for about twenty yards without lifting his head, until the effort had neutralized the first cool contrast of the water. Then he turned over and pushed his hair back, treading water, and found the girl not far away.

"It's good, isn't it?" she said.

"Very good," he smiled.

He had an idea she was referring to something more than just the ordinary goodness of a temperate sea, but his reply was safe and would have been the same anyway. Somehow it was always a new surprise, because the opportunities were so rare, to rediscover the fantastic difference between swimming in the raw and swimming in anything else at all. Perhaps it was not only the unfamiliarity of total physical liberation, but a throwback of memory to old swimming holes and boyhood truancies and golden days of innocence that could never come again.

She swam idly along for a while, drifting towards one side of the bay, and the Saint paddled lazily beside her because it was the most natural thing to do. Presently they were close to a smooth step of rock, and the girl climbed out on to it and sat there, shaking the water out of her yellow hair, like a sea-nymph. After a moment, the Saint pulled himself up beside her.

"Tell me now what you think," she said.

"I'm enjoying myself," he told her.

"You should stay a long time."

"That's another matter. This is quite an experience, sort of out of this world—and there aren't a lot of things I haven't done. But I was never curious to go to the ordinary kind of nudist colony. There was something that didn't appeal to me about the secretiveness, about having to join up, and the feeling that you'd be somehow committed to a Cause. I've had my own crusades, but I hate being organized. This is different, I admit. This is a lot of people being allowed to do what they want to do, and taking advantage of it, and yet really doing it on their own. But—"

"You think there is something queer about us?"

"To be honest, I half expected to see a rather freakish-looking bunch of people. I was wrong about that. As a matter of fact, I'd say that on the whole they're a hell of a lot better looking than the average of what you'd find on any ordinary beach. I'm glad there's a place like this for them, since this is what they want. But as a way of life, it doesn't mean the same to me that it does to Uncle Waldo."

"At least, you don't despise Mr. Oddington for liking it."

"Not a bit. I think he's very lucky to only want what he can have, and to be able to have it."

"His nephew despises him."

"I'd just say, he disapproves."

"He disapproves of me, too."

"I don't think he can figure you out. If it comes to that, I've been trying to figure you myself. You speak English very well—"

"I taught in a school in England for three years."

"Then you also have a better than ordinary education. And you have much better than ordinary looks, and an attractive personality. There must be plenty of other things you could do—things that most girls would like better."

"But I like it here," she said simply. "And Mr. Oddington likes it. And what he likes, I like even more. Is that so unusual where you come from?"

He nodded.

"Sometimes."

"Why don't you say that you think there must be something wrong because he is so much older?"

"Even if I did, it wouldn't be any of my business. But you can understand why it might worry George."

She looked at him without a trace of the coquettish mischief that played so easily on her face.

"Mr. Oddington is a very good man. He is different from other people in his way, but he does nobody any harm. I have known young men who were not good at all."

Simon held her eyes steadily for a few seconds. If anyone had ever predicted that he would one day hold a conversation like that with a sea-nymph sitting on a rock without a stitch on her, he wouldn't have believed it. This was what you could get for striking up conversations with strangers in bars, he thought.

He looked back towards the beach, where he could see Mr. Oddington and his nephew still sitting together. McGeorge was still firmly enveloped in his shirt, while Mr. Oddington poked restively at the stones with his spear-gun. It was too far to see any expression on their faces, but the abruptness of an occasional gesture suggested restrained violence in the discussion.

"I wish you luck," said the Saint. "But I don't think George will give you any blessing."

"Then," she said, with a toss of her head, "it's what you call too bad about him."

She stood up, straight and lovely, and then sprang from her toes and arrowed into the water.

The Saint watched her come up and start swimming towards the shore. The breeze which springs up in the Mediterranean almost every summer afternoon was chasing turbulent riffles even into the sheltered bay. And in the dancing water an increasing number of swimmers, nearly all

of them equipped with the diving masks and snorkel breathing tubes without which even a nudist might have felt undressed for Mediterranean swimming in those days, cruised in all directions like a fleet of miniature submarines.

Simon stayed on the rock and wondered whether he should follow her, not knowing exactly how he was meant to take her parting retort.

Then, as her blonde head drew near the beach, she found a footing and came upright with her shoulders clear of the water, and at the same time one of the swimmers near her also stopped and stood. The swimmer pushed his mask up on to his forehead to talk; but even without that distant sight of his face, by the development of his shoulders and the carriage of his head, Simon recognized the same persistent male whose arrival at the cove he had already noticed.

He dived in and swam towards them, as quickly as he could without too noticeable a churning of water, and keeping his head down as much as possible. But in that way, because of the rustle of water around his ears, he heard nothing until he stopped swimming a yard from them. And then he only heard Nadine say the one word: *"Demain."*

Then Nadine saw him.

"I wish I'd brought one of those masks," he said conversationally. "The water here must be wonderful for them."

"Yes, it is," she said.

She was angry—it was easy to see that, although she had it under control. But whether it was because of the interruption, or because of what had been interrupted, he had no way to tell. He let his feet down to the bottom and stood smiling as if he were unaware of any tension at all, and looked at the other man in such a way that it would have been almost impossible for her to avoid making the introduction.

"This is Monsieur Pierre Eschards," she said. "Mr. Templar."

Eschards extended a hand, flexing his biceps.

"Enchanté," he said, but he did not look enchanted. The stare that he gave the Saint was cold and insolent. Then, as if Simon had already passed out of his life again, he turned back to the girl and took her hand. The way he looked at her was quite different in its intensity. *"J'attendrai,"* he said.

He touched her fingers to his lips, pulled down his mask, and swam away.

Nadine followed him a little distance with her eyes, biting her lip.

Simon took a chance.

"That's the fellow you first came to the island with, isn't it?" he said casually.

"I suppose Mr. Oddington told you." The frown stayed on her brows. "It makes him very cross that Pierre has come back. He does not even think I should speak to him."

"You can't altogether blame him for that."

"Pierre is my cousin. We have known each other since we were children. I cannot suddenly pretend not to know him."

"But didn't you say you were —sort of engaged?"

"For a while. I cannot undo the past. But that is all over. It was over when I began to go with Mr. Oddington. He should believe that."

Simon shrugged.

"He might find it easier to believe if Pierre stayed away."

"I did not ask him to come. He just came here, from Antibes, where he likes to spend the summer. He said that he wanted to see how it was with me. He should have stayed there. It is a much better place for him."

"And full of consolations, if you can afford them."

She gave him a slow measuring look.

"There are plenty of rich women who can afford them," she said.

It fell into place with a click. The Saint knew now why something about Pierre Eschards had seemed vaguely familiar. He was a type. You could find three or four of his duplicates any day of the season at a place like Eden Roc—sleek and handsome young men, wearing their hair rather esthetically long but with carefully cultivated and tanned physiques, lounging around like well-fed cats, with bold and calculating eyes.

"But I thought you couldn't afford to stay here unless you had a job. What attracted him to you?"

"Everyone thought my grandfather was rich, and would leave me money. But that summer he died, and he had lost it all in the stock market. After that, Pierre was not so much in love. I did not believe it at first, but I know now that he was only waiting for an excuse for us to break up."

"But you said he came back to see how it was with you."

"I did not say he was not fond of me at all. He said I should not be wasting my life here—that presently Mr. Oddington would die, and I would not be so young, but I would have nothing. I told him that Mr. Oddington had thought of that in his will, even before we are going to be married . . . You ask a lot of questions, don't you?"

"I can't help being interested in people's problems," he said disarmingly. "I'm afraid Pierre was rather upset when I butted in. You'd just been telling him something, hadn't you? I only heard you say, 'Tomorrow.'"

"I told him that Mr. Odding-

ton and I were going to be married tomorrow."

Simon raised his eyebrows.

"Well, congratulations! I did not know it was as close as that."

"We gave our notice at the *Mairie* long ago. But only when we went to our siesta this afternoon, he said we must do it tomorrow, while his nephew is still here."

"That ought to have made Pierre happy, if he was worried about you. But I thought he looked mad."

"He pretends he is still in love with me," she said slowly. "He says if anything goes wrong I can still come to him. You heard what he said when he left: *'I shall wait.'* "

She did not waver under the Saint's quietly judicial scrutiny, but the Saint knew exactly how little that could mean. It is only in fiction that no liar can look an interrogator in the eye. But everything she said seemed to hold together—or he had consistently failed to trip her up. He began to feel embarrassed about the impulse that had started him probing at all.

He looked around to see what had happened to George McGeorge and his Uncle Waldo. They were not on the beach where he had last seen them.

It took him a little while to locate them, and ultimately it was a flash of McGeorge's white skin that ended the search. The family confab must have ended, with or without a decision, and Mr. Oddington had finally succeeded in bullying or cajoling his nephew into the water to join him in trying out the new speargun. Whether McGeorge had also been coaxed or coerced into surrendering his last stronghold of modesty could not be determined from there, for both men had waded in above their waists and the surface of the water was choppy enough to interrupt its transparency.

"Well, if George hasn't decided to give you his blessing, at least he seems to have called off his sulk for the moment," said the Saint, with an indicative movement of his head.

Nadine put a light hand on his shoulder.

"I suppose I should try to make him like me," she said. "If you really do care for people's problems, I think you could help."

She began to walk through the water towards the shore and at an angle towards the other end of the beach where Mr. Oddington and McGeorge were. As the water shallowed, her breasts came above it, full and yet taut. The ripples dropped to her hollow waist, then to her hips; and Simon Templar, wading up beside her, found that he still had to make an occasional conscious effort to keep his attention up

to the levels that the philosophy of the island took for granted.

He disciplined himself to keep looking at Mr. Oddington, who had fitted his own diving mask on to McGeorge and was urging him to put his head down in the water and enjoy it. McGeorge also had the spear-gun in one hand, which seemed to be an added liability to a natural clumsiness. McGeorge eventually achieved a more or less horizontal position, in which he floundered rather like a drowning beetle.

"If Uncle Waldo is still a vegetarian, why does he want to spear fish?" Simon wondered idly.

"For the sport," she said. "It is not a moral thing, only because he thinks vegetables are better for health. When he catches anything, he gives it—"

Her voice broke in a gasp.

Out of the water where McGeorge was thrashing something lanced like a streak of quicksilver, and then froze in the form of a slim shaft of steel that stood rigidly, grotesquely, out of Mr. Oddington's chest. Simon saw it at the same time, very clearly and horribly, before Mr. Oddington rolled over and fell with a soggy splash.

IV

"It is only to be expected that he would say it was an accident," said the gendarme. "Not many murderers are so ready to follow their victims that they confess at the first moment."

The memory of McGeorge's statement was etched on the Saint's mind in especially sharp detail, for it had fallen to him to act as interpreter.

"I haven't the faintest idea what happened," McGeorge had said. "I heard him give a sort of yell, and looked up, and there he was with that spear thing sticking in his chest. I dropped the gun and struggled over to him—he was only a couple of yards away—and dragged him out on the beach. The gun came trailing after him because the spear's attached to it with a short length of line. It must have gone off all by itself."

"Were you on good terms with your uncle?" the gendarme had asked.

"I was very fond of him. But I suppose you'll soon find out that we'd been having an argument today."

"It was about something personal?"

"Yes."

"Yet soon afterwards you were swimming with him, and playing with this *arbalète* which you had brought him as a present"

"The argument was over."

"I shall have to ask what it was about."

"All right. I'm sure everyone

knows that he was going to marry Mademoiselle Zeult. I told him I thought she was only marrying him for his money. He didn't think so. Finally I suggested a way to settle it. I dared him to tell her that he'd deceived her and he didn't have any money at all, and see if she still wanted to marry him. If she did, I'd apologize and lick her boots —if she had any. He agreed. In fact, he was so sure of her that he was as happy as if he'd already won a bet. So he insisted on me playing with his toy, as if he wanted to show that he didn't bear any grudge. He was so eager that I had to give in."

Simon could still hear McGeorge's clipped precise accents and see his blanched tight-lipped face. Without pretending to any inhuman nervelessness, he had handled himself with a cool competence that any lawyer would have applauded, neither evading nor protesting too much. But in spite of that, McGeorge was now locked away somewhere in the building, while the gendarme sat in his little office scanning the notes he had written in an official ledger in an extraordinarily neat and rapid longhand.

Simon gave him a cigarette.

"Do you always treat an accident as if it were a murder?" he inquired.

"When there are grounds to suspect that it could be, yes," said the gendarme politely. "That is the law."

He was, Simon had gathered, the only civilian officer of the law on the island. He was quite a young man, with a pleasant face, but very serious.

"Figure it to yourself, *monsieur,*" he went on. "You have a man of some means, because he lives here all the time in a good villa and does not have to work. He has a young girl who is his secretary and housekeeper and no doubt other things. That is all right. But then he is going to marry her. *Alors,* very soon comes his nephew, who does not want this. That, too, is natural. If the uncle is married, perhaps there is no more money for the nephew. He tries to tell the uncle that the girl is only marrying for money. They argue. At last, they agree on a test.

"But then, at once, the uncle is so happy that the young man is afraid. The uncle seems to be so sure, that suddenly the nephew thinks that the girl could love the old man after all—such things have happened—and the test will fail, and he will have lost everything. Perhaps, he thinks, an accident would be much more certain. And in his hand he has the weapon. It takes only the touch of a finger."

"Just like that, on the spur of the moment?"

"The thought of murder may have been in his mind before.

It needed only the opportunity, the right circumstance, to send a message down his arm to the trigger. A very carefully planned murder may be good, if it succeeds; but the more elaborately it is prepared, the more risk there is that the preparation may be discovered. A murder on impulse can be just as good, and even harder to prove. But it is still murder. I have thought a lot about these things."

"But Mademoiselle Zeult told me that Oddington had already made a will in her favor. So killing him would get McGeorge nowhere."

"Can you swear that McGeorge knew that? If not, the proof remains that he had motive."

The muscles in the Saint's jaw flickered under the skin. It was all presumptive, all circumstantial; and yet under the French criminal code which requires the accused to prove his innocence rather than the prosecution to prove his guilt, it could be a wicked case to beat.

"What happens next?" he asked.

"I have telegraphed to Toulon. I do not have the equipment or qualifications to do any more here. In the morning an Inspecteur of the *Police Judiciaire* will arrive and take charge. If you wish to help your friend, I would suggest that you send for an attorney."

"I'm not interested in helping anyone," said the Saint grimly. "I only knew Monsieur Oddington a few hours, but I liked him very much. If he was murdered, I want someone to go to the guillotine for it."

The gendarme nodded.

"He was perhaps a little eccentric, but I think everyone loved him. And I am employed to serve justice, *monsieur.*"

Simon doubled his right fist into a tight knot and ground it slowly into the palm of his left hand. The exasperation that found an outlet in that controlled gesture went all the way up his arms into the muscles of his chest. His eyes were narrowed between a crinkle of hard lines.

It was a cut-and-dried case . . . and yet something was wrong with it. The instinctive understanding of crime which was his special peculiar gift told him so, brushing aside superficial logic. The infuriating frustration came from trying to pinpoint the flaw. It wasn't a straightforward problem like listening to a musical recording with an expert ear and spotting one or two false notes that had been played.

It was more as if one or two whole instruments were micrometrically off key, playing perfectly consistently as units and yet infinitesimally out of tune, so that the entire performance was elusively discordant.

"There are still inconsisten-

cies," he said, groping. "I heard McGeorge disagree with his uncle quite openly. Once or twice he was almost rude. He made sarcastic remarks that Monsieur Oddington might easily have resented. Would he have risked that if he was so anxious to stay in his uncle's good graces? . . . And about Mademoiselle Zeult. A man who is really infatuated is just as likely to fly into a rage with anyone who says derogatory things about his girl as he is to wonder if they might be true. Perhaps more likely. Why would McGeorge risk running her down so openly when he could have been much more subtle?"

"Perhaps because he was stupid."

"But just now you thought he was rather clever."

The gendarme lifted his shoulders and arms and opened his hands in the Latin gesture which says everything and commits itself to nothing.

"The investigation will decide which is true, *monsieur.*"

"Listen," said the Saint. "You told me you did a lot of thinking about these things. So I imagine that being the village cop in a place like this is not your idea of a life's career. You may never have a chance like this again. Instead of waiting for the boys from Toulon to investigate and decide everything, suppose you could hand them a case that was all wrapped up and tied with ribbons. Would that help you to get a transfer to some place where you could find some serious detecting to do?"

The gendarme studied him shrewdly.

"Because I am interested in crime, I know who you are, *Monsieur le Saint.* I will hear what you suggest, so long as it is not against the law."

"I only want you to let me play a hunch," Simon said, "and stand by to cash in on it if it pays off."

A new exhilaration surged into him like a flood as he walked back to Oddington's villa in the failing dusk. It was a lift of spirit with no more sober foundation than the fact that at last he had stopped being a spectator and had something to do. But there was an energy of wrath in it too, for he could not think of the death of Waldo Oddington as the mere impersonal data in an abstract problem.

It is more common in stories that the murder victim is an evil character whom many people have good reason to hate. In real life, it is more often the well-meaning innocent who has the bad luck to stand in the way of some less worthy person's greed or ambition, and who dies without even realizing that he had an enemy. But if only villains got knocked off, Simon thought savagely, there wouldn't be much

incentive to try to convict murderers.

He went in at the unlocked door of the villa and fumbled for a light switch inside the living room before he remembered that there was no electricity. He took out his lighter and struck it. From a chair near the terrace, Nadine Zeult looked at him unblinkingly.

"There is a lamp on the table," she said.

He went over to it, raised the glass chimney, and tilted his lighter. Illumination spread out to fill the room as the lamp flame took over and he adjusted the wick.

The girl continued to watch him without expression. She had put on a plain black dress with only a touch of white at the collar. There were no tears on her cheeks, but her eyes were puffy and shadowed.

"Are you all right?" he said. "The gendarme kept me answering so many questions."

"What could you tell him?"

"I had a job to convince him that I scarcely know McGeorge at all."

"Why did he do it?" she said, in a dry and aching monotone. "Why?"

The Saint used his lighter again, on a cigarette. There was still one crevice in which a wedge could be started, which could open a split through which anything might fall. He saw nothing to be gained by waiting another moment to strike there. Win or lose, there would be no better time to try it—the test that Waldo Oddington had agreed to, but which had not been made.

"One thing came out," he said flatly. "It seems that everybody was wrong about Uncle Waldo—just like they were about your grandfather. He wasn't a rich man at all. It turns out he didn't have a dime."

Her eyes stayed on him so fixedly that they seemed hypnotized. And then, faintly and hollowly, she began to laugh.

It was a thin racking laughter, almost soundless, that shook her whole body and yet had nothing to do with mirth.

"So you are just like the others," she said. "I expect you would believe that I wanted someone to kill him. Perhaps even that I somehow helped to arrange it. I thought better of you. Oh, you fool!" She stood up suddenly, straight and quivering. "Let me show you something."

She crossed the room to the desk and jerked open a drawer. If she had brought out a gun he would hardly have been surprised, she was shaken with such an intensity of passion; but instead it was only a cheap cardboard file that she spilled out on the top of the desk. The papers scattered under her hands as she

skimmed through them, until she found what she wanted. She brought it back and thrust it at him.

"Read that!"

Simon took it. It was on a chastely discreet letterhead that said only INFINITE ENTERPRISE CORPORATION, above the address, with the words engraved even smaller in the left-hand corner: *Office of the Chairman.* He read:

Dear Uncle Waldo:

Please forgive me for being a bit late with the enclosed check for your usual quarterly allowance. I've had to do a lot of traveling lately, and I somehow lost touch with my personal calendar. I hope this hasn't inconvenienced you too much.

Regarding your wish to own the villa you are now renting, I'd like to advance you the price, and agree that it might be an economy in the long run; but in view of the rumors about the French Navy's plans for the island, don't you think we should wait a little longer until you're sure the investment won't be jeopardized . . .

There was more of it, but the Saint's eyes were already plunging to the foot of the page, where it ended:

Your affectionate nephew,
GEORGE.

Simon Templar was conscious of seconds that crawled by like snails before he regained his voice.

Images unscrambled themselves and reassembled in their proper place as if a complex of distorting prisms that overlaid them had been snatched away.

"Of course," he said huskily, almost to himself. "May God forgive me if I ever let myself think in clichés again. In books it's always the rich uncle and the no-good pampered nephew whose only idea of a career is to keep putting the bite on Uncle. So everything that George said, I had to take the wrong way. I couldn't even hear him properly when he told me how fond his mother was of Uncle Waldo, and how she'd made George promise practically on her deathbed that he'd try to be like a son to the old boy. I was too clogged-up in the brain to be able to remember that there could also be such a thing as a penniless uncle with a rich nephew."

"Yes," Nadine said, with the resentment still burning in her voice. "George is very rich. Waldo told me all about him. He buys and sells companies and manipulates shares. He is called some kind of boy wonder in finance."

"My second feeble-minded fatuity," Simon went on scarifying himself ruthlessly. "Because George is young, and snotty, and

stuffy, and in every way the type of jerk I long to stick pins into, it never dawned on me that he could be fabulously brilliant in some racket of his own. Or that anyone I personally disliked could be extravagantly loyal and generous to his family."

"He was. Very generous."

"But when you came along, he wanted to be sure that he wasn't going to be fleeced at second hand, by way of Uncle Waldo. You can't blame him for wondering what he might have had to bail Uncle Waldo out of."

"Waldo could have told him in a minute that I knew everything, and that we wanted nothing extra from him."

"But you've seen what George's personality is like. I can imagine how it would rub Uncle Waldo the wrong way. Only he couldn't show it—he had to try to keep George happy, instead of it being the other way around. But when George proposed that corny and pretty insulting test, Uncle Waldo must have nearly bust a gut. It would have been a crime to tell him then that you already knew. It was much more fun to look forward to seeing George's red face when you told him yourself."

"So," she said, "now you believe me."

He nodded.

"That was my third blind spot. When one sees a pretty young girl like you with a man of over sixty, it's so easy to think of another cliché. I humbly apologize."

She gazed at him for a long time, while the last of the fire slowly died down in her and was spent.

"It isn't your fault," she said in a low voice. "It would be hard for you to understand. But I told you how I had been disgusted with young men, through Pierre—and perhaps others. I loved Waldo—no, not in the romantic way that you would think of love, but with a full heart. With him I felt protected, and safe, and sure; and that was right for me."

The Saint lowered his eyes to the piece of paper which he still held, and after a moment got it back in focus.

"Who else knew about this?" he asked.

"No one," she said. "He told me, because that was his kind of honesty. But he did not want anyone else to know, because that was his one harmless little pride, to let it be thought that what he had was his own."

"And when you told Pierre that Waldo had made you his heiress—"

"It was partly to try to stop Pierre bothering me, and partly to build up Waldo. Pierre is the last person to whom I could tell the truth. How he would sneer!"

Simon's cigarette reminded

him of itself when it burned his fingers. He crushed the stump into an ashtray.

The door opened at the front of the house, and Pierre Eschards came through the archway. He had on a pair of very short shorts that displayed his muscular thighs, and a dark mesh shirt open to the waist. His hair glistened with brillantine. He gave the Saint a glance that barely condescended to recognition, and went straight across to Nadine and put an arm around her.

"I could not go to bed without being sure that you were all right," he said in French. "Is there anything I can do?"

"No," she said quietly.

"*Pauvre petite.*" His lips brushed the top of her head. "But you are young. It will pass. You must not let it spoil the rest of your life. And when you want me to help you forget, I shall be at your service."

The Saint put McGeorge's letter down with the other papers strewn on the desk, slipping it sideways so that it would not be staring anyone in the face. All the rest of what he had to do seemed suddenly so straightforward.

"I was just going to tell Nadine the latest development," he said, now speaking in fluent French himself. "There are no fingerprints of McGeorge's on the spear gun that shot Oddington."

They both turned to him with sharply widening eyes.

"Fingerprints?" Eschards repeated. "But of course there would not be any. It was in the water."

"A greasy fingerprint wouldn't wash off so quickly," said the Saint. "And where people are using sun-tan oil, they usually have greasy fingers. There were other fingerprints on the gun, but none of his. And because he was new here and afraid of a burn, he had oil all over him."

There were times when the Saint's facility of invention was almost incredible, but now he was hardly touching its resources. It was more like describing things that came to his mind by extra-sensory perception, which were separated from actuality only by a slight displacement of time and would soon become authenticated facts even if he took the liberty of anticipating them.

"Then they have not searched well enough," Eschards said. "In any case, why do they want fingerprints? The spear that killed Oddington was attached to the gun by a cord, so it was not fired from any other gun."

"But the gun was not attached to McGeorge," Simon said calmly. "In his statement, McGeorge said that when his uncle was shot, he dropped the gun he was holding and went to help him. The gun was pulled in after-

wards by the cord. Now, there are many *arbalètes* exactly like that, because the experts consider it the best. Suppose somebody with an identical gun swam beside McGeorge and shot his Uncle Waldo; and then, when McGeorge let go his gun, exactly as one could expect, and went to help his uncle, this other person grabbed McGeorge's gun and swam away with it under water—it would look as if McGeorge did it. And even McGeorge might believe that he had had an accident, *n'est-ce pas?*"

Nadine said: "But the water was so clear—"

"No," said the Saint. "If you remember, it had turned a little choppy."

"But it is absurd anyway," Eschards broke out. "Who else would have a reason to do that?"

Simon shrugged.

"That may be harder to answer. But the first thing is to find the other gun. My guess is that the man who did it would have hidden it somewhere around the beach, because with his guilty conscience he would be nervous about being seen with the same type of gun so soon after the killing. If we find it, it will have McGeorge's fingerprints on it besides the other man's, and that will be the proof. I came here to borrow a flashlight, and I'm going back to search."

"Tonight?" Eschards objected. "You will find nothing. Wait till tomorrow, and I will help you."

"By tomorrow the murderer may have gone back himself and taken it away." Simon addressed himself to the girl. "Is there a flashlight here?"

Nadine seemed to be straining to read his eyes.

"Yes," she said. "In the top drawer on the left."

Simon took it out and tested it.

"Just wish me luck," he said, with a brief grin at them both, and went out quickly.

He walked out on the road over which Mr. Oddington had led him so happily that afternoon, not dawdling but not rushing it. The night was full of a massed chirping of cicadas that could have practically drowned any other sound further from his ears than his own footsteps. But he was not worried until he had turned off the road on the side path, and picked his way rather gingerly down the steepening slope, and come out at last on the narrow trail that edged down the sheerest stretch of the final cliff. That was where he heard the tiny scuff of sound that he had steeled himself to wait for, exactly where he had expected it, and he twisted to one side as something grazed the side of his head and thudded with sickening heaviness into the blackness beyond.

Then a weight clamped on his shoulders and an arm around his neck, and he was borne irresistibly down; but he was set for it, and he dropped the flashlight and threw all his strength into turning so that at the last instant it was his assailant who hit the rocky path first and the Saint was on top and cushioned.

The attacker had the strength of a young lion, but the Saint was powered by a cold fury such as few crimes had ever aroused in him, a pitiless hate that could only be slaked by doing personal violence to the wanton destroyer of one simple happy man. He got one forearm solidly across his opponent's throat, clamping the neck to the ground, and drove his fist like a reciprocating piston into the upturned face . . .

"*Ca suffit,*" said the gendarme.

With a flashlight in his hand, he forced himself between the Saint and another potential corpse, and metal clicked on the wrists of the man underneath.

"I told you this was where someone would jump me, if my scheme worked out," said the Saint exultantly. "I only had to be found at the bottom there with my skull caved in on a rock, and it would look as if I slipped and fell in the dark. Another fortunate accident. Shall we really hunt for that other spear-gun now, or wait till tomorrow?"

"I saw him following you, and then I saw him attack you," said the gendarme judicially. "That requires a motive, and there is only one that is plausible."

"You have the rest of it," Simon said. "It was only the kind of impulse, or inspiration, that you spoke of this afternoon, but he saw how to kill Monsieur Oddington so that McGeorge would surely be convicted of it, and therefore would not be able to inherit anything. And in that way Nadine would become rich, and he was sure that after a while he would be able to win her again and marry her."

The swollen eyes of Pierre Eschards glared up into the flashlight beam out of his bruised and bloody and no longer handsome face.

"It is not true," he croaked. "It was my gun that killed Oddington, and then I was frightened and I let go of it and took the gun that McGeorge dropped and swam away with it so that he would be accused instead of me. But I had not meant to fire the gun. It was an accident!"

"I think it is you, instead of Monsieur McGeorge, who will now have to convince the *juge d'instruction* of that," said the gendarme.

THEY BURIED Waldo Oddington in a shaded corner of the tiny flower-grown cemetery on the island.

"That is what he would have chosen," Nadine said.

Later, after they had walked most of the way back to the village in silence, George McGeorge said, in his stiff awkward way: "I suppose you'll soon be wanting something to occupy yourself. I've been getting involved in one or two deals with European connections lately, and I'll need a secretary here who speaks languages. Perhaps you'd like to think about the job."

She looked at him uncertainly for a moment, and then put out her hand.

"Thank you," she said, with a very small smile. "I think I would like it."

Simon wondered if there might be some unforeseen changes in the future of Mr. McGeorge.

Among the Contributors to Next Month's SAINT *will be*

LESLIE CHARTERIS, *with* "The Benevolent Burglary"

JOHN DICKSON CARR, *with* "The Black Cabinet"

MICHAEL INNES, *with* "The Ragged Pedestrian"

LAWRENCE G. BLOCHMAN, *with* "The Riviera Renegade"

T. S. STRIBLING, *with* "Murder in the Hills"

JOHN D. MacDONALD, *with* "Three's a Shroud"

and many others

the old man in the window

by . . . Margery Allingham

"Old Rosemary" hadn't changed outwardly in fifty years. But a dead man can age very quickly.

NEWLY APPOINTED Superintendent Stanislaus Oates was by no means intoxicated. But he was indubitably cheerful, as became a man celebrating an important advance in a distinguished career, and Mr. Campion, who sat opposite him at the small table in the corner of the chop-house surveyed with approval the change in his usually taciturn friend.

"This promotion puts me into the 'memoir class' when I retire, you know," observed the ex-Inspector suddenly with uncharacteristic ingenuousness. "I could write a first-rate book if someone put it down for me. We professionals get to know all kinds of things—interesting stuff for the most part—that you amateurs either never come across, or dismiss as of no consequence. I ran into something very curious today. Big business is extraordinary, Campion. There are amazing inducements to crime in it. Let me tell you something about Company Law."

Mr. Campion grinned. "Tell

When the first enchantingly fallible and heart-warmingly human sleuth appeared in open defiance of the Sherlock Holmes tradition—spellbinding as that tradition was—modern detective fiction took a tremendous step forward. There have been a good many of them in recent years. But if you've a preference for the brilliant methodical gentleman who opposes his wits to stodgy inspectors with a "little-boy-who-stole-the-jam" complex Margery Allingham's renowned Mr. Campion should get your vote. And here he is in all of his glory.

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the world as well," he suggested affably, for the Superintendent's voice had risen. "I thought you said this place was deserted in the evening," he went on, stretching his long thin legs under the table and adjusting his horn-rimmed glasses. "It seems to me to be pretty well crowded with youth and—er—behavior almost scandalously amorous."

The ex-Inspector's innate caution reasserted itself and as he glanced about him his long face took on its natural melancholy expression.

"Must have suddenly become fashionable," he said gloomily. "That's the trouble with these places. The word goes round that a certain restaurant is good, quiet and cheap, and what happens? Before you know where you are a great flock of chattering young lovebirds swoop down on it and up go the prices while the food goes to pieces. There's a lad over there out with someone he doesn't intend to take home to meet the family."

Mr. Campion, glancing casually over his thin shoulder, caught a glimpse of a heavily-jowled face beneath a domed head prematurely bald, and beyond it the dark curls and crimson lips of a girl in a gray hat. He looked away again hastily.

"The name is March," said Oates, whose spirits were reviving. "He's a member of the big theatrical machinery firm. It's strange we should see him now. It reminds me of what I was going to tell you. They're in low water again, you know."

His voice promised to carry across the small print-hung room, and Mr. Campion protested.

"Does a double Scotch always make you shout?" he inquired gently. "I urge restraint. I know the fellow quite well by sight. We're members of the same club."

"Really? I heard the clubs were having a thin time," said Oates more quietly, but unabashed. "Still, I didn't know they had to let *anyone* in."

Mr. Campion looked hurt. "He's a valued and respected member as far as I know," he said, "and may very well be out with his wife."

"Don't you believe it," said Oates cheerfully. "Little Miss Attractive is on at the Frivolity, or was until the show closed last week. And what's more, my lad, Mr. Arthur March has been picked by the experts to marry someone else in less than a month. A good policeman studies everything, even the gossip columns. It bears out what I told you about you amateurs not being thorough. You don't collect sufficient out-of-the-way information. Take this Company Law, for instance . . ."

He broke off, a light of interest in his mournful brown eyes.

From where they sat, the view of the entrance was unobstructed and Campion, following his glance, saw two young people come in. Superintendent Stanislaus Oates grinned broadly.

"This is good," he said. "That's the girl March is engaged to—Denise Warren. She's out on an interesting date with a boy friend, too. They've come here because they've heard it's quiet, or I miss my guess. They haven't seen March yet."

Mr. Campion did not speak. He was looking at the girl. She was an unusual type, taller than the average and very fair, with wide apart blue-gray eyes and a magnificent carriage.

Her companion was a square, solid young man, only a few years her senior. He was quite good looking and had an air of authority about him unusual in one of his age. They found a table and settled down in full view of Campion and his guest.

Oates was frankly delighted. "They'll see each other in a moment," he said with schoolboy mischievousness. "Who's the fellow with her? Do you know?"

Mr. Campion was frowning. "Yes, I do," he said. "That's Rupert Fielding, the surgeon. He's young but an absolute prodigy, they say. I hope he's not playing the fool. His is the one profession that still demands absolute conventionality."

Oates grinned. "Another member of the club."

Campion echoed his smile. "Yes, as it happens. Spends all his spare time there. Gives the older members a sense of security, I think. You know how such things are."

Oates glanced at the girl again. "Oh well, she's keeping it in the family, isn't she? What is this famous club? Not Puffin's?"

"No. Quite as respectable if not so eminent. The Junior Greys, Pall Mall."

Oates sat up. "Curiouser and curiouser," he said. "Isn't that the place where the old boy sits in the window all day?"

"Old Rosemary?"

"That's the man. One of the landmarks of London. Hasn't changed in fifty years. It's a funny thing, I was hearing of him today, as I was going to tell you. Is he as old as they say?"

"He's ninety some time this year."

"Really?" The superintendent was interested. "I've seen him, of course—dozens of times. You can't very well miss him sitting there in that great window. He looks young enough from the street. Scraggy men like yourself wear well. What's he like close to?"

Mr. Campion considered. He was eager to give serious attention to any subject which would divert his guest's embarrassing attention from his two fellow

members and their more intimate affairs.

"One doesn't get very close to him in the ordinary way," he said at last. "That bay window is his holy of holies. There's a draught screen round the back of his chair and a table between him and the rest of the room. I'm seldom there early enough to see him come in in the morning, but I meet him tottering out in the evening—six-thirty to the dot."

"He's frail then?" the superintendent persisted. "Frail but young looking? I'm sorry to be so inquisitive," he added, "but I don't like freaks. How young does he actually look close to in good light?"

Mr. Campion hesitated. "He's very well preserved," he began at last. "He's had all kinds of things done to him."

"Oh, facial stuff, rejuvenation, toupees, special teeth to take out the hollows—I know." The superintendent spoke with contempt. "That accounts for it. I hate that sort of thing. It's bad enough in old women, but in old men it's revolting."

He paused and, evidently thinking that he might have expressed himself too harshly, added graciously, "Of course, when you remember he was a distinguished actor it doesn't seem so bad. He was one of the first of the stage knights, wasn't he?"

"I believe so. Sir Charles Rosemary, one of the really great figures of the 'eighties. They say he was magnificent."

"And now he spends his days sitting in a window trying to look sixty," the superintendent murmured. "Is it true he does it all day and every day?"

"An unbroken record of twenty years." Mr. Campion was growing weary of the catechism. "It's quite a legend. He comes up to the club at eleven o'clock and sits there until six-thirty, as I've said."

"My God," said Oates expressively, and added abruptly, "Hello, he's seen her!"

Mr. Campion gave up all hope of diverting him. The superintendent's round, dull eyes were alight with amusement.

"Look at March," he said. "He's wild. Isn't that typical of that sort of chap? He doesn't seem to realize he's in the same boat himself. Can you see him?"

"Yes, in the mirror behind you," Campion admitted grudgingly. "Rather awkward for his guest, isn't it?"

"She's used to it, I'd say," said the inspector cheerfully. "Look at him."

Arthur March was furious and appeared to be indifferent about showing it. He sat upright in his chair, staring at his fiancee and her companion with white-faced indignation. Opposite, the girl in the gray hat did her best to

look faintly amused, but her eyes were wary.

Campion looked at Miss Warren and caught her at the moment when curious glances from other tables directed her attention to the angry man on the other side of the room. She met his eyes for a moment and grew slowly crimson. Then she murmured something to the stolid young man at her side.

Oates was very interested. "March is going over," he said suddenly. "No, he's changed his mind. He's sending a note."

The waiter who bore the hastily scribbled message on the half sheet torn from a memorandum book looked considerably embarrassed and he handed it to Miss Warren with a word of apology. She glanced at it, blushed even more deeply than before, and passed it on to Fielding.

The young surgeon's square, immobile face became a shade darker and, leaning towards the girl, he said something abruptly. She hesitated, looked up at him and nodded.

A moment later the waiter was off across the room again, a faint smile on his face. The superintendent frowned. "What happened?" he demanded. "I didn't see, did you? Wait a minute."

Before Campion could stop him he had risen from his seat and sauntered off across the room, ostensibly to get a pipe out of the pocket of his overcoat which hung on a stand near the doorway. The somewhat circuitous route he chose led him directly behind March's chair at the moment when he received the return note from the waiter.

Oates came back smiling. "I thought so," he said triumphantly as he sat down. "She wrapped her engagement ring in his own note and sent it back to him. Oh, very dignified and crushing, whatever he wrote! Look at him now. Is he going to make a row?"

"I hope not," said Mr. Campion fervently.

"No, he's thought better of it. He's going." The superintendent seemed a little disappointed. "He's livid, though. Look at his hands. He's shaking with fury. I say, Campion, I don't like the look of him. He's positively demented with rage."

"Don't gape at him then, poor chap," his host protested. "You were going to tell me something of unparalleled interest about Company Law?"

The superintendent frowned, his eyes still on the retreating figures at the other side of the room.

"Was I? This little show has put it out of my head," he said absently. "Well, they've gone and the other two are settling down again. That's the end of that little romance. I enjoyed it."

"Obviously," said Mr. Cam-

pion bitterly. "It's probably cost me two perfectly good acquaintances. But what of that, if you're happy? The whole incident will have been washed away with a few discreetly-shed tears in a day or so and might have been decently forgotten. Still, if you enjoyed it—"

The ex-inspector regarded him owlishly. "You're wrong," he said. "I'm not a man given to—er—soothsaying. No, there's a better word—"

"Prophecy?" suggested Campion, laughing.

"Prophecy," echoed Oates with success. "But I tell you, Campion, I have a definite impression that the incident we have just witnessed is going to have far-reaching consequences."

"You're tight," said his companion.

He was, of course. But it was a remarkable thing, as he himself pointed out afterwards, that he was unequivocally right at the same time.

The engagement between Miss Denise Warren and Mr. Rupert Fielding, F.R.C.S., was announced at the end of August, a decent six weeks after the intimation that her marriage to Mr. Arthur March, son of the late Sir Joshua March, would not take place. And when Mr. Campion walked down Pall Mall to the Junior Greys one morning in October the whole affair was ancient history.

It was a little before twelve and the sun was shining in at the great bay windows of the club, windows so large and frank that the decorous gentlemen within looked almost more like exhibits under glass than spectators of the procession of traffic in the street below.

As he approached the building, Mr. Campion was aware of a subtle sense of loss. It was not until he had stood for some seconds on the pavement surveying the broad facade of the left wing of the building that he realized where the difference lay. When he saw it he was shocked. The great chair in the center window of the lounge was occupied not by the familiar aquiline figure of Old Rosemary, but by a short, fattish gentleman by the name of Briggs, a member of but ten or fifteen years' standing, a truculent tasteless person of little popularity.

Mr. Campion entered beneath the Adam porch with a premonition of disaster and was confirmed in his suspicions a few moments later when he discovered Walters, the head steward, in tears. Since Walters was a portly sixty-five and possessed a dignity which was proverbial, the spectacle was both shocking and embarrassing. He blew his nose hastily when Mr. Campion appeared and murmured a word of apology, after which he added baldly: "He's gone, sir."

"Not Old — I mean Sir Charles Rosemary?" Mr. Campion was shocked.

"Yes, sir." Walters permitted himself a ghostly sniff. "It happened this morning, sir, in his chair where he always sat, just as he would have liked. Mr. March and one or two other gentlemen had a word with him when he first came in and then he dozed off. I saw him sleeping heavily, but didn't think anything of it, him being so old. But when Mr. Fielding came in about an hour ago he noticed at once that something was wrong and called me.

"We got the old gentleman into a taxi between us and Mr. Fielding took him home. He died in the taxicab. Mr. Fielding has just come in and told us. He'd have been ninety in two day's time. It's a great shock. Like the end of an era, sir. I remember the old Queen going, but it didn't seem like this. I remember him when I came here forty years ago, you see."

Mr. Campion was surprised to find that he was a trifle shaken himself. There was a great deal in what Walters said . . . old Rosemary had been an institution.

As he came into the lounge he caught sight of Fielding standing by the eastern fireplace with a small crowd round him. Mr. Campion joined it.

Fielding s professional calm was standing him in good stead. He was giving information quietly and seriously, without capitalizing, or even seeming conscious of, the undue prominence into which chance had forced him. He nodded to Campion and went on with his story.

"He was breathing so stertoriously that I went and had a look at him," he was saying. "He wasn't conscious then and didn't recover before the end, which came in the taxi, as you know."

"He had a flat in Dover Street, hadn't he?" someone asked.

Fielding nodded. "Yes. Walters got me the address. He'd gone before we arrived and I knew I couldn't do anything, so I got hold of his man, who seems a very capable chap. We put him on to his bed and the servant told me that his regular physician was Philipson, so I rang Harley Street and came away."

"Sir Edgar was upset, I bet," said a man Campion did not know. "They knew each other well. Still, he was very old. I don't suppose he was surprised. The very old often die suddenly and peacefully like that."

The crowd split up into smaller groups, which grew again as other members came in to lunch, Mr. Briggs' behavior in commandeering the sacred chair came in for a good deal of comment and the secretary received several complaints. A half-excited gloom as at a major dis-

aster settled over the smoking-room, and the newspapers, who had already been notified by one of Walters' underlings, received quite a number of calls.

An awkward incident occurred just before lunch, however. Mr. Campion witnessed it and was shocked by it, in company with nine-tenths of his fellow members present. Arthur March came in and made a scene.

It began in the hall when he heard the news from Scroop, the porter. His high thin tones protesting disbelief reached the lounge before he appeared himself, pale and excitable, in the doorway. He sank into a chair, snapped at the wine steward, and, after mopping his brow a trifle ostentatiously, rose to his feet again and came across the room to where Fielding stood with Campion.

"This is ghastly," he said without preamble. "I was with the old man only this morning, you know. He was in one of his black moods, but otherwise he seemed perfectly all right. You found him, didn't you? Was—was it peaceful?"

"Perfectly," said Fielding shortly. He was obviously embarrassed and Campion found himself wondering if the two men had ever spoken since the little scene in the city chop-house earlier in the year.

"Thank God," said March with nauseating fervor. "Oh—thank God!"

He did not move away and the surgeon hesitated. "Relation of yours?" he inquired abruptly.

March colored. "Practically," he said. "My grandfather and he were like brothers."

The explanation evidently sounded a little lame, even to himself, for he took refuge in wholly unwarrantable abuse.

"You wouldn't understand that sort of loyalty," he muttered and turned on his heel.

Fielding stood looking after him, his eyebrows raised. "That chap's in a funny mental state—" he was beginning when Mr. Campion touched his sleeve.

"Lunch," said Mr. Campion.

It was after the meal, nearing the end of the hour of pleasant somnolence sacred to the gods of digestion, when the Junior Greys experienced its first real sensation since the suffragette outrage of which no one ever speaks.

Campion had been watching with lazy eyes the efforts of the bishop in the chair next his own to keep his attention on the pamphlet on his knee when he saw that divine sit upright in his chair, the healthy color draining rapidly from his plump cheeks.

At the same moment, on the other side of the room, Major General Stukely Wivenhoe's cigar dropped from his mouth and rolled on the carpet.

A communal intake of breath,

like the sigh of a great animal, sounded all over the room and in a far corner somebody knocked over a coffee cup.

Mr. Campion hoisted himself on one elbow and looked round. He remained arrested in that uncomfortable position for some seconds.

Old Rosemary, immaculate and jaunty as ever, was coming slowly across the room. There was a red carnation in his buttonhole, his flowing white hair glistened, and his curiously unwrinkled face wore its customary faint smile.

Behind him, portly and efficient, strode Sir Edgar Philipson, the Harley Street man.

It was a petrifying moment and one which demanded every ounce of the Junior Grey's celebrated aplomb.

Half-way across the room the newcomers were met by a page hurrying in with the early editions. Confronted by the spectacle of Old Rosemary himself, the boy lost his head completely. He thrust an *Evening Wire* at the old man.

"They—they say you're dead, sir," he blurted out idiotically.

Rosemary took the paper and peered at it while the stupefied room waited in silence.

"Greatly exaggerated," he said in the unmistakable clipped tone they all knew so well. "Take it away."

He moved on to his chair. No one saw Briggs leave it. Some insist that he crawled out behind the screen on all fours, and others, more imaginative, that he dived out of the window and was afterwards found gibbering in the basement. At all events his departure was silent and immediate.

Old Rosemary sat down and, beckoning to a paralyzed servant, ordered a whiskey and soda. Meanwhile, Sir Edgar Philipson stood looking round the room and Fielding, pale and incredulous, rose to meet him. The elder man was not kind.

"That's the trouble with you younger men, Fielding," he said in a rumbling undertone that was yet loud enough to be heard. "Over-hasty in your diagnosis. Make sure before you act, my boy. Make sure."

He walked away, a handsome old man very pleased with himself.

Fielding glanced helplessly round the room, but no one met his eyes. Mr. Campion, who alone was sympathetic, was looking at Old Rosemary, noting the healthy brilliance of his eyes and the color in his cheeks.

Fielding walked out of the room in silence.

Mr. Campion dined alone that evening and was writing a brief report on his own share in the *Case of the Yellow Shoes,* which had just come to a satisfactory conclusion, when the young sur-

geon called. Fielding was embarrassed and said so. He stood awkwardly in the middle of the study in the flat in Bottle Street and made a hesitating apology.

"I'm terribly sorry to presume on an acquaintance like this, Campion," he said, "but I'm in such a devil of a mess. That chap Rosemary, you know, he was dead as mutton this morning."

Mr. Campion produced a decanter. "I should sit down," he said. "It soothes the nerves and rests the feet. I suppose this affair is going to be—er—bad for business?"

Fielding looked relieved and a faint smile appeared for an instant on his square, solemn face.

"Frightfully," he said, accepting the glass Campion handed him. "It makes such a darned good story, you see. Rupert Fielding is such a brilliant surgeon that he doesn't know when he's beaten and the patient is dead. It's all over the place already. I shall be ruined. Incompetence is bad enough in any profession, but in mine it's unforgivable.

"And," he added helplessly, "he was dead, or at least I thought so. His heart had stopped and when I got him home I tried the mirror test. Of course miracles do happen nowadays, but not under old Philipson. At least I wouldn't have said so yesterday. It's funny, isn't it?"

"Odd, certainly," Mr. Campion agreed slowly. "When you talk of these modern miracles, what are they exactly?"

"Oh, electrical treatment and that sort of thing," Fielding spoke vaguely. "You see," he added frankly, "I'm not a physician; I'm a surgeon. I've done a certain amount of medicine, of course, but I don't set up to be a G. P. Drugs are not in my line."

Mr. Campion glanced up and his pale eyes behind his spectacles were inquisitive. "You're wondering if the old boy couldn't have taken something that produced a pretty good simulation of death?" he suggested.

The younger man regarded him steadily. "It sounds far fetched, I know," he said, "but it's the only explanation I can think of, although what on earth the stuff can have been I can't imagine. You see, the dreadful thing is that I didn't do anything to save him. I just made up my mind he was dead and, realizing the whole thing was hopeless, I simply rang up Philipson in accordance with medical etiquette."

"I see," Mr. Campion spoke gravely. "What do you want me to do?"

Fielding hesitated. "If you could find out what actually happened you'd save my reason anyway," he said so simply that the words were robbed of any hint of melodrama. "Nothing can save my career, at least for a few

years, I'm afraid. But I tell you, Campion, I must know if I'm losing my grip or if my mind's going. I must know how I came to make such an incredible mistake."

Mr. Campion glanced at the dignified youngster and noted that he betrayed no hint of the nervous strain he was undergoing. He felt his sympathy aroused and at the same time his curiosity. Before he could speak, however, Fielding went on.

"There are other complications, too," he said awkwardly. "I'm engaged to Old Rosemary's grandchild, you know, and when I tell you she's his principal heir you'll see how infernally awkward it all is."

Mr. Campion whistled. "I say, that's very unfortunate."

"It is," said Fielding grimly. "And it's not all. I'm afraid she broke off her engagement with Arthur March on my account and he had the impudence to phone her about this business almost as soon as it happened. I saw him this evening and frankly, I don't understand the fellow. My mistake is an appalling one, I know. Old Rosemary's perfectly entitled to sue me. But March has taken the business as a personal insult. He blew me up as if I was a schoolboy, and after all he's only the grandson of a friend of the family. There's no blood tie at all. I couldn't say much to him, I'm so hopelessly in the wrong."

Mr. Campion considered. "I noticed the old man when he came in this afternoon," he said. "He was looking remarkably well."

Fielding smiled wryly. "If you'd gone close to him you'd have been amazed," he said. "I was when I got him into the cab. It's vanity, I suppose, but the amounts of time he must spend while his man gets him ready for the day must be considerable. It's gone on for so many years, I suppose, that the little additions and adjustments have mounted up, but what began presumably as a toupee is now damned nearly a wig, I can tell you. I don't think you'd have seen any ill effects of a drug even if there were any. Still, I've talked too much. Will you have a shot at it?"

Mr. Campion would not commit himself. "I'll have a look round," he said. "I can't promise anything. It sounds like conjury to me."

All the same, the following morning found him at the Junior Greys much earlier than usual. He sought out Walters and cornered him in the deserted smoking-room. The steward was in a loquacious mood.

"A dreadful thing, sir," he agreed. "Quite a scandal in its way. One gets to trust doctors, if I may say so. Still, I'd rather face a dozen scandals than lose

Sir Charles. Yes, he's here already, right on his usual time and in one of his good moods."

Mr. Campion smiled. "His bad moods were pretty sensational, weren't they?"

"Well, he's old, sir." Walters spoke indulgently. "There are days when he snaps everybody's head off and sits sulking over his paper without speaking to a soul, but I don't take any notice because I know that tomorrow he'll be quite different, quite his old charming self with a nod and a smile to everyone. I always know which mood it's to be. As soon as he comes in he calls for a whiskey. If it's a good day it's whiskey and water, and if he's upset it's whiskey and soda, so I have plenty of warning, you see."

Mr. Campion thanked him and wandered away. He had suddenly become very grave and the expression in his eyes behind his horn-rimmed glasses was one of alarm.

He went down to the telephone and called Oates. Less than twenty minutes later he and the superintendent were in a taxi speeding towards Fleet Street. Stanislaus Oates was his customary sombre self. The somewhat elephantine gaiety which he had displayed at the chop-house was gone as if it had never been. This morning he was a trifle irritable.

"I hope this isn't a wild goose chase, Campion," he protested as the cab lurched down the Embankment. "I'm not an idle man, you know, and I've got no business careening off on a purely private jaunt like this."

Campion turned to him and the elder man was surprised by the gravity of his expression. "Somehow I don't think even you could keep this business private if you wanted to," said Mr. Campion grimly. "Here we are. Wait for me."

The cab had pulled up outside a dingy building in a narrow court, and the superintendent, peering out after his departing guide, saw him disappear into the offices of *The Curtain,* the well-known stage weekly, famous for its theatrical columns and intimate gossip.

He was gone for some little time, but seemed pleased with himself when he reappeared. He gave an address in Streatham to the man and clambered back beside his friend.

"I've got it," he said briefly. "We shan't be too late to interfere, although, of course, the main mischief is done. Why? That's what I don't understand. It couldn't have been merely to discredit Fielding; that was taking far too long a chance."

"I wish you'd explain and not talk like the wrong end of a telephone," said Oates testily. "What have you got from the benighted hole we've just left?"

Campion looked at him as though he had only just remembered his existence. "The address, of course," he said briefly.

The cab drew up at last in a wide suburban street where each pair of houses were exactly like the next, red brick, white stucco, and solid chocolate paint.

Mr. Campion led the way up a short tiled path to a neat front door, and Oates, who had taken one look at the windows with their drawn blinds, followed him hastily, his irritation vanishing.

A little woman in a dark overall, her gray hair scraped into a tight knot at the back of her head, opened the door to them. Her face was mottled and her eyes red.

"Mr. Nowell?" she echoed in response to Campion's question, and then, fishing hastily for her handkerchief, she began to cry.

Mr. Campion was very gentle with her. "I'm sorry," he said. "I shouldn't have asked for him like that. He's dead, isn't he?"

She looked up at him sharply. "Oh, you're from the police, are you?" she said unexpectedly. "The doctor told me there'd have to be an inquest, as the death was so sudden. It's been such a shock. He lodged here so long."

She made way for them and they crowded into the little hall. The superintendent realized they were entering by false pretenses, but there seemed to be no point in going into explanations just then.

"When did you find him?" Campion inquired cautiously.

"Not till this morning when I took up his breakfast. The old woman was anxious to talk. "He must have died last night, so the doctor says. He put me through it very carefully. 'Well, he was alive at ten o'clock,' I said, 'because I spoke to him.' I always go to bed at a quarter to ten and if Mr. Nowell was late he didn't like me to sit up for him. He had his own key and there was always someone to help him up."

She paused for breath and Campion nodded encouragingly. "Well," she went on, "last night I had just turned out my bedroom light when I heard a motor stop and then the door went. 'Is that you, Mr. Nowell?' I called. 'Yes, Mrs. Bell,' he said. 'Good night.' A little while afterwards I heard the car drive away."

Oates interrupted her. "Did the chauffeur come in with him?"

Mrs. Bell turned to him. "I don't know if it was the chauffeur, sir, but somebody did. He was nearly eighty, you know, and it was nothing for the gentleman who brought him home to help him up to his room."

"Can we see him, please?" asked Mr. Campion softly.

Mrs. Bell began to weep again, but afterwards, when they stood

bareheaded in the big front bedroom and looked down at the gaunt still figure on the bed she began to speak quietly and with pride.

"You're not seeing him as he was at all," she said. "He was wonderfully handsome with his white hair, his cane and his buttonhole. He used to take a great pride in his appearance. Spend hours and hours and pounds and pounds over it, he would. There was something he used to do with his cheeks to make them stand out more; I don't know what it was."

Campion bent towards her and murmured something. She shook her head dubiously.

"A photograph, sir?" she repeated. "No, that's a thing I don't think I have got. He was extraordinarily touchy about having his photograph took, which was funny when he thought so much of himself, if I can say such a thing without meaning to be unkind. Wait a minute, though, I do believe I've got a little snapshot I took of him in the garden one day when he didn't know it. I'll go and get it."

As soon as they were alone Campion bent over the man on the bed and raised an eyelid very gently.

"Yes, I think so," he said softly. "Fielding couldn't be blamed for not noticing that. It would look like a perfectly normal death to him, thinking he knew the fellow's age. If we can get your people on to this at once and get 'em to test for morphia sulphate, I fancy they'll get results, if they hurry."

The superintendent's question was cut short by the return of Mrs. Bell with a faded snapshot and they adjourned to a little light room at the back of the house.

"There he is," she said proudly. "I was lucky to find it. That was taken last summer. He wasn't going up to town so often then."

"What did he do in London?" inquired Mr. Campion, holding the photograph down to the annoyance of the superintendent.

Mrs. Bell looked uncomfortable. "I hardly know," she said. "He used to tell me he spent his time in his nephew's office keeping an eye on things, but I think myself he was in a sort of high-class library and was one of those people who sit about making the place look respectable. 'Dressing the house' we used to call it in my stage days."

Oates smiled. "That's a funny idea," he said. "I've never heard of it being done in a *library.*"

"Well, a very expensive tailor's then," she persisted. "I know I thought I saw him sitting in a window in West End Street once. He wasn't doing anything; only sitting there and looking very nice. I asked him

about it, of course, but he got very angry and made me promise never to speak of it again."

The front door bell interrupted her and she hurried out with a word of excuse.

Oates turned to Campion. "I'm in a fog," he said. "You'll have to explain."

The younger man gave him the snapshot and he stared for a moment at the little photograph of a tall, thin, distinguished figure walking down the gravel path of the tiny garden.

"Old Rosemary!" ejaculated the superintendent and raised a bewildered face to his friend's. "Good lord, Campion, who was that chap in the next room?"

"John Nowell, Sir Charles Rosemary's understudy at the Thespian Theater thirty years ago—and ever since, apparently."

Mr. Campion spoke calmly. "I admit the idea didn't seem credible when I first thought of it," he went on, "but afterwards, when I looked into it, it became obvious. Nowell got his job nearly sixty years ago because he resembled Rosemary; that was when he was twenty. Rosemary was nearly ten years older, but they were the same type and very much alike in feature.

"Since then Nowell has spent his life imitating the great actor. He copies his walk and his mannerisms, and as the two men grew older the simulation became easier. Rosemary resorted to artifical aids to keep young-looking and Nowell to the same aids to look like Rosemary."

"Yes, yes, I get that," said the superintendent testily. "But in the name of heaven, why?"

Mr. Campion shrugged his shoulders. "Vanity takes a lot of explaining," he said. "But Rosemary was a rich man and I think it was worth his while to employ a fellow, already a pensioner of his perhaps, to sit in the Greys and keep the legend of his perennial health alive. If ever Rosemary was prevented from going to the club Nowell took his place. When you think of it, Rosemary's record at the Greys, all day and every day for twenty years, is much more hard to swallow than this explanation of it."

Oates continued to stare at the photograph. "I grant the looks," he said suddenly, "now that I've seen the chap in the next room, but what happened if he had to talk?"

"He didn't," said Campion. "At least hardly at all. For the last few years Rosemary's been having moods. On his good days he was his old self. On his bad days he was very nearly speechless with sulkiness. It was these moods that put me on to Nowell, as a matter of fact. Walters told me this morning that on his good days Rosemary drank whiskey

and water and on his bad ones whiskey and soda.

"I have met men who'd drink whiskey and soup at a pinch, but never one who hadn't a definite preference in the water or soda controversy when he was in a position to choose. It occurred to me, therefore, that there must be two men, and an understudy naturally came into my mind because the imitation had to be so perfect. So I called at *The Curtain* offices and was lucky to catch Bellew, who does the old-timers' gossip. I asked him if Rosemary ever had a regular understudy and he coughed up the name and address immediately."

"Neat," admitted the superintendent slowly. "Very neat. But what are *we* doing here and where's the crime?"

"Well, it's murder, you know," said Mr. Campion diffidently. "Yesterday morning someone gave that poor chap in there a shot of something in his whiskey and soda under the impression that he was giving it to Rosemary. Nowell dropped into a coma at the club and young Fielding, the surgeon, seeing that he was pretty far gone, took him home. In the cab he died. Morphia sulphate produces very much the same symptoms as the sudden cardiac collapse of the aged, and Fielding, thinking it was a clear case, left the body with Rosemary's man at the Dover Street flat, phoned Sir Edgar Philipson, and went away like a polite little medico.

"When Philipson got there, of course, he saw Rosemary himself, who was perfectly fit. I imagine Nowell's body remained at Dover Street all day and in the evening, when Mrs. Bell was thought likely to be in bed, the valet, probably aided by Rosemary's chauffeur, brought it down here. They took it up to his room, as they'd often done before, and went away."

"But the voice?" protested the superintendent. "He spoke to the landlady; she said so."

Campion glanced at him. "I think," he said slowly, "old Rosemary must have come down here, too, just in case. After copying him so long, Nowell's voice was a replica of Rosemary's, you see."

"At ninety?" exclaimed the superintendent. "A nerve like that at ninety?"

"I don't know," said Mr. Campion. "It takes a bit of nerve to get to ninety, I should say."

Oates glanced towards the door. "She's a long time," he said, "I wonder if that was the Coroner's Officer . . ."

He went out on to the narrow landing with Campion behind him and appeared just as Mrs. Bell opened the door of the front bedroom and showed a white-faced man out. "I can't tell you any more, sir," she was saying

stiffly. "Perhaps you'll ask the police gentlemen here?"

She got no further. With an inarticulate cry the stranger swung round and the light from the landing window fell upon his face. It was Arthur March. He stood staring at Campion, his eyes narrowed and the knotted veins standing out on his temples.

"You — you interfering swine!" he said suddenly and sprang.

Campion only just met the attack in time. As the man's fingers closed round his throat he jerked his knee upward and caught his opponent in the wind. March collapsed against the flimsy balustrade, which gave beneath the sudden weight and sent him sprawling on to the stairs below, Campion after him.

A vigorous pounding on the hall door announcing the arrival of the Coroner's Officer added to the general confusion, and the superintendent, with an energy surprising in one of his somewhat dyspeptic appearance, pounced down upon the two scuffling on the stairs.

It was nearly three hours later when Mr. Campion sat in Oates' office at Scotland Yard and expostulated mildly.

"It's all very well to arrest him on the assault charge," he was saying, "but you can't hold him. You can't prove the attempted murder of Rosemary, or the actual murder of Nowell."

Stanislaus Oates sat at his desk, his hands crossed on his waistcoat. He was very pleased. "Think not?" he inquired.

"Well," said Mr. Campion judicially, "I hate to dampen your enthusiasm, but what have you got? Walters can swear that March met him in the lounge yesterday morning and persuaded him to let him take the old man's refresher over to him, as he wanted an excuse to have a word with the old boy, who was in a bad humor. There's opportunity there, I know, but that's not much in court. Then you can show that March spotted his error and, by much the same process of reasoning as mine, arrived at Nowell's. And you can prove that he attacked me. But that's your whole case. He'll go scotfree. After all, why should March want to kill Rosemary? Because the old boy's granddaughter wouldn't marry him?"

"That's not as absurd as you think, my boy." Oates was avuncular. "As a matter of fact, if Denise Warren had married Arthur March, Rosemary would never have been attacked."

Mr. Campion stared at him and the superintendent continued contentedly. "Do you remember a meal we had together at Benjamin's chop-house to celebrate my promotion?"

"Perfectly. You were very tight and made an exhibition of us."

"Not at all." Oates was scandalized. "I was observant and informative. I observed Miss Warren break off her engagement with the grandson of Rosemary's old friend, Sir Joshua March, and I tried to inform you of certain facts. You wouldn't listen to me. Do you remember me telling you that you amateurs don't collect enough data? Do you remember me telling you about Company Law?"

"It comes back to me," Mr. Campion admitted.

The superintendent was mollified. "Did you know it's a common practice among small companies to raise money on large life insurances taken out on behalf of a member of the firm for the express purpose of such money raising?"

"Yes, I had heard of it. But it's usually a partner who insures his life, isn't it?"

"Not always. That's the point." Oates was beaming. "If the partners are none of them particularly good risks they often insure a junior member of the firm, or sometimes an outside person altogether who happens to be a 'good risk' as they call it. Now look here, Campion . . ." Oates leaned across the desk. "When Allan March and Son—the first Sir Joshua was the son in those days—were in low water sixty-odd years ago, they wanted to take out a sixty thousand pounds policy in order to borrow upon it.

"Allan March was an old man and Joshua was a heart subject. They needed someone who was a good risk, you see, because the sum was so large that it was necessary to get the premium as low as possible. Rosemary and Joshua were friends and in those days Rosemary was something of a marvel. His constitution was wonderful, his habits were temperate, and also he had a strong publicity value."

He paused and Campion nodded.

"Go on. I'm following."

"Well, March and Son approached the Mutual Ordered Life Endowment, who were a young firm then, one of the first of the flashy, up-to-date insurance companies, and they agreed to take the risk at an extremely low premium because of the publicity and because, of course, the fellow had a pretty good life. Rosemary agreed to stand for his part in the business, that is, he agreed to have himself insured, for friendship's sake and because the Marches were in a bad way.

"But as a sort of gesture he made a stipulation. 'If I live to ninety,' he said, 'the policy reverts to me.' It was a joke at the time because the heavier Victorians didn't usually reach anywhere near that age, and any-

way it was the immediate loan which interested everyone. However, they agreed to it and it was all duly signed and sealed."

"Have March and Son kept up the insurance?"

"Oh, yes." The superintendent was watching Campion's face as he spoke. "I don't suppose it's been convenient for them to repay the sum they borrowed on that policy and I don't know where, since the premium was so low, they could have bought such a loan more cheaply. But you see the situation now. I'd have told you all this back in the summer if you'd listened. It's a clear case, isn't it?"

Mr. Campion blinked. "If Old Rosemary died before his ninetieth birthday, then," he said at last, "the residue of the sixty thousand goes to March and Son. But if he lives until after tomorrow it will pass into his own estate and go to Denise Warren."

"Tomorrow's the ninetieth birthday, is it?" said Oates. "March was cutting it pretty fine. I suppose he hoped the girl would come back to him and he'd get the cash through her. Well, my lad, what have you got to say now?"

"Nothing," said Mr. Campion affably. "Nothing, except that it wasn't Company Law, was it? It sounds more like Insurance to me."

Oates shrugged his shoulders. "You may be right," he said airily. "I'm not a dictionary and I didn't go to a night school. Still," he added with a chuckle, "we like to feel we do a little, you know, we professionals. You amateurs have your uses now and again, but when it comes to the groundwork we've got you licked every time."

Mr. Campion grinned at him.

"I really think you believe that, you old sinner," he said.

In a classic Charteris saga the Saint accepts a sporting bet to burglarize a house, and scores one of his roguishly inimitable London period triumphs.

THE BENEVOLENT BURGLARY

By LESLIE CHARTERIS

in the next SAINT

melody in death

by . . . Baynard Kendrick

Gina seemed destined for operatic stardom. But Captain Maclain knew that "glamor" could be stippled out by "murder" — in Braille.

GINA D'AURIA, youngest star of the Knickerbocker Opera Company, repeated the last few bars of the aria from *Cesare,* flooding the confines of the small rehearsal-room with an overplus of sound. She held the top note with a distinct physical effort and, breathing skillfully in spite of her weariness, allowed her strong young voice to flutter gently down. It still was not right. She knew it as soon as the last note died. A glance at the face of Paul Metcalfe, the taciturn assistant conductor, seated at the piano, confirmed her knowledge.

Instead of asking her with his unvarying politeness to try it again, as she feared and expected, Metcalfe looked at his wrist watch and closed the lid of the upright with a tiny bang.

"It's half past eleven," he announced. "That's enough for tonight." He rolled up the score, tucked it under his arm, and vanished abruptly into the corridor, leaving Gina alone.

Every so often an editor discovers to his delight that one of America's most popular mystery writers has brought to his craft such a perfect blend of unusual dramatic ingredients—the opera stage in a flurry of hidden wealth excitement, a blind detective's sight-surpassing acumen and suspense raised to high C— that his task of selecting a memorable lead novel automatically solves itself. Baynard Kendrick's Captain Maclain stands before the bar accused of being the most remarkable "handicapped" sleuth in contemporary belles-lettres.

From MAKE MINE MACLAIN, published by William Morrow & Co., Inc.
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With the door left open and her own singing stopped, she could hear from another rehearsal-room the clear, powerful voice of the famous tenor, Michl Soulé. Gina listened for a moment, and then walked slowly to her dressing-room four doors down the corridor.

She sank down on the skirted chair in front of her dressing-table and stared with annoyance into the triple mirror. There were lines of fatigue marring the oval purity of her face, and, unless she was careful, portending crow's-feet at the corners of her deep, intelligent black eyes.

She added more by wrinkling her forehead, high and smooth beneath the classical set of her hair. She had worked like a fool, much too hard, but she wanted to be at her best when the Knickerbocker produced *Cesare*. Gina crossed her arms on the table and lowered her head to rest against them, closing her eyes to keep back unshed tears.

Her grandfather, Rodolfo D'Auria, was dead. The old musician had been ailing for several years, but he had managed to finish his opera, *Cesare,* before the end came. Gina could picture his frown if the granddaughter he had trained from childhood should sing his aria badly. Her grandfather had stood for perfection. She could give him no less, since he had given her everything.

The sound of hammering drifted in from the stage and beat against Gina's door. Michl Soulé's singing stopped abruptly at the noisy intrusion.

The telephone rang. She raised her head, stared at the phone with hostility, suppressing an impulse to push it from the table. Then she uncradled it and said, "Hello."

It was Jacqueline Marlowe, laughing through her words: "I'm phoning from a pay booth in a cigar store, darling. I'm just a block or two away and I'll be right up. I'm taking you out for rarebits at Reuben's."

"Jackie, I'm too tired."

"You'll always be too tired, darling, if you never play. Dane's joining us, and he'll be terribly disappointed if you don't come. Besides that, Arthur Considine's with me."

Gina sighed inwardly. Dane Marlowe and his attractive wife were more than old friends to Gina. They were powerful and important factors in any young prima donna's career. Dane's company had made and installed the mechanical stage equipment —orchestra lifts and counterweight systems—in the Knickerbocker Opera House as well as in nearly every large theater in the country.

It was not good policy at any time to disappoint Jackie and Dane, but her weariness overcame business caution and even

the lure of a midnight snack with Arthur Considine didn't tempt her. She made another try: "Jackie, I simply can't."

"I'll be right up, Gina. I have something important to tell you. You can wait five minutes anyhow and tell me how tired you are when I arrive."

Mrs. Marlowe disconnected. Gina sighed and slowly replaced the telephone.

Jacqueline Marlowe never got tired, but then it was easy to stay rested and refreshed when your husband was as wealthy as Dane Marlowe and you were further mattressed by five million dollars of your own. Gina realized she was being catty, but there were times when Jacqueline's silk-sheathed slenderness in its nutshell of mink touched her with irritation by its very unvarying perfection. Gina knew that Jacqueline's gold-blond hair would be upswept into her neat coiffure without a waving tendril, and that the mink would fall in harmonious lines even though Jacqueline had packed herself into a booth to use the telephone.

It was more trouble to compete with Jacqueline's energy than to give way to it. Gina might be dead on her feet, but she would finish up at Reuben's eating rarebit. She looked at herself in the mirror and decided that the print she was wearing must do. Jacqueline was always on time.

Gina paused with a lipstick halfway to her full red lips, her black eyes widened. The noises of the crew busy on the stage had ceased, leaving the building unnaturally quiet. Audible now in the frame of silence was the sound of somebody humming.

The melody was quaint and haunting. It reached down into Gina's heart with reminiscent fingers, holding her motionless at the table with her hand half raised. In it was the tragic history of a nation and something of slumbrous nights and velvet stars, with Italian mothers crooning a million babies to rest. In it was a slice of Gina's childhood.

The humming grew closer and footsteps approached her dressing-room door. Mixed with the footsteps was something else—the scratching of nails on the concrete floor and the gentle pad of four soft paws. They came nearer.

Gina left her chair, crossed the room, and flung wide the door. The corridor was dim and she drew back startled and a little embarrassed.

A man was outside. He wore a loose English ulster of pepper-and-salt and was carrying gloves and a gray felt hat in his right hand. In the dim light of the corridor he loomed inordinately tall. He stopped both walking and humming as Gina opened the door. His left hand was

clutching a U-shaped brace harnessed to the most beautiful German shepherd dog Gina had ever seen.

The dog turned its head, gazed at Gina, and yawned deliberately, exhibiting boredom by its curling tongue. The man stood rigid, as he seemed to gaze down the length of the deserted hall.

Gina said, "I'm sorry if I startled you. Were you just humming a song?"

The man's head turned slowly. Light from the dressing-room lit up furrows in his strong, mobile face and brought a strange, reflecting glint into perfect eyes. The eyes made Gina uncomfortable, for they seemed to stare straight through her, fixing their gaze on the opposite wall.

"I'll plead guilty to humming, but it's not exactly a song." He smiled, and his whole face came alive, creasing itself into tiny hills and valleys with a marvelous play of expression which reached from his square-cleft chin to his crisp dark hair. His eyes stayed blank, still holding her. It took her several seconds to reach the conclusion that the man was totally blind.

Surprise at his ease and self-assurance immediately blanketed her first, quick surge of pity and momentarily drove from her mind the reason why she had stopped him. It was difficult enough for a person with eyes to negotiate the backstage tiers of the Knickerbocker Opera House. The hall itself was cluttered with lockers, trunks, and scattered props left over from many operas. An archway thirty feet to the left of Gina's dressing-room led to the vast stage, where the traps in the floor and the jumble of scenery and ropes made walking dangerous even for a sure-footed stagehand.

He brought the melody to her mind again, speaking reflectively: "I've been listening to Michl Soulé rehearse the tenor part of *Cesare*. The melody I was humming is part of the tenor aria. I'm an old friend of Michl's and privileged, I guess, on account of my blindness. Not many outsiders get to hear rehearsals."

"No," said Gina, "they don't." She touched his arm with her fingers. "I'm Gina D'Auria. My grandfather composed *Cesare*. I'm waiting for a friend here in my dressing-room. If you have a few minutes I wish you'd come in and sit down."

"That's kind of you," he said without hesitation. "I'd love to."

She guided him in from the hall, the German shepherd keeping close to his side until they reached a chair.

"I'm Captain Duncan Maclain, and this is Schnucke," he told her as they settled down.

"I'd guessed that already," said Gina. "Michl and Jacque-

line Marlowe have both mentioned you."

"Oh, so you know Jackie, too. Of course. I'd forgotten that she is practically godmother to the opera."

"As a matter of fact," said Gina, "I'm expecting her here right now. She phoned from a couple of blocks away that she'd be right over."

The Captain took out a heavy silver case and offered her a cigarette.

Gina said, "That's another of life's pleasures forbidden by my singing. But smoke if you want to. It doesn't bother me at all."

She watched him as he flashed his lighter and applied the flame with neat precision. Then, picking up a silver tray, she placed it on the table beside him.

Maclain smoked thoughtfully, inhaling with enjoyment, letting the smoke trickle out slowly from mouth and nostrils. "I'm curious," he said frankly, depositing some ashes accurately in the tray.

"About me?"

"About the melody I was humming. Your grandfather wrote the opera and you're singing in it. How is it you didn't know it was part of the score?"

"Because it happens to be in the tenor part, and I'm a soprano. I probably won't hear the whole opera until the first rehearsal with the orchestra, and I haven't had a chance to look over the score in its entirety. All the principal parts are rehearsed separately, as Michl has probably told you."

The captain nodded and rumpled his crisp dark hair. "My blindness has endowed me with an insatiable lust for asking questions. Jackie's probably told you that. If I become presumptuous, you can always throw me out. But there was something more than idle curiosity in your voice when you asked me about that song."

She was silent for a moment, toying with a gold-backed mirror. "When I was six or seven, my grandfather composed it for my brother and me. Our parents died when we were babies and we lived with our grandfather in Naples. We had a governess who was very strict and who thought that sweets were bad for children. Grandfather used to hide candy and cookies in the piano. When we'd come in from playing he'd casually give us the signal by humming or singing that little song."

She paused and put the mirror down. Maclain snuffed out his cigarette in the tray. As though it were a signal, a burst of song came from across the stage, flooding the opera house with a good-night accolade from Michl Soulé.

Gina said, "My brother died when he was ten. Later I translated the Italian words of the song into English. It makes a

little rhyme. Would you care to hear it?"

The captain nodded.

She sang very softly,

"The laughter of happy children
Is the memory of a dream.
The little prince and princess
May not be what they seem."

The captain touched his braille watch.

"I hadn't heard it for years," Gina said. "Not until I heard you humming it. To think that he put it in his opera for me and I didn't know until now."

Her dark eyes closed and her thoughts went back to Naples—the smell of the harbor and fishing boats and the ragged sails—a villa on the white, dusty road, and children playing in the sun.

When she opened her eyes again she saw that the captain was listening. His finely chiseled head was tilted at the slightest of angles. His strong, fastidious hands were crossed in his lap, the nervous fingers in repose. Only one well-shod foot was moving as he gently stroked the back of the dog beside him with a polished toe.

The leather-bound clock on Gina's dressing-table showed five minutes to midnight. She said, "It's almost time for the night stage crew to come in. Jackie must have got sidetracked some place."

"Does she know where your dressing-room is?" The captain asked the question as though his own smooth voice might disturb his concentration.

"She's been in here a dozen times."

"Theaters fascinate me," said Duncan Maclain. "Theaters and all types of auditoriums. They're the only buildings I know of constructed to enhance the qualities of sound."

He stood up abruptly. "I have to identify my friends by voices and footsteps, Miss D'Auria. I live in a world of sound. If Jackie got sidestracked, it was somewhere here in the opera house. I'm certain I heard her footsteps on the stage many minutes ago. She was crossing with someone else just as Michl started to sing. If you'll take my arm we might go out and look around."

Gina said, "She was probably with Arthur Considine. He drove her down."

They went to the door together. Schnucke pressed close to her master's left side, then dropped back and hesitantly settled herself on the floor again as he gave a command to lie down.

Gina opened the door and guided the captain through, her hand nestled lightly in his arm.

Maclain walked with confi-

dent stride beside her, his lithe, well-knit body standing straight and strong.

She turned him right, through the arch at the end of the hall, and stopped in the wings, pressing closer to him. A single dim worklight burned straight ahead, lost in the vastness of a sixty-foot stage that was nearly a city block long. Far overhead two other lights shone dimly, helping not at all. Darkness swept on up above them to touch the gridiron, where, during a performance, high-perched workmen looked down on the singing puppets eighty feet below and shook their heads.

Gina forced herself to speak: "I don't see any sign of anyone. If those were Jackie's footsteps you heard, she must have gone." Her voice sounded flat and dead, smothered with silence.

Far above her, a man laughed. The laughter was leaden, too, striking incongruously into the darkened silence, chunks of mirthless sound tumbling over the railing of the scene painters' fly sixty feet overhead and plummeting swiftly down.

"The night crew's coming in," said Duncan Maclain. "Suppose we cross the stage and see if the doorman's seen anything of Mrs. Marlowe."

"She couldn't have been here."

"Come along." He was moving forward, assuming the role of leader himself, dragging her into nothingness.

"I think we'd better wait until the night crew comes in and puts on some lights," said Gina. "I can't see very well, and I'm afraid the stage would be hard to cross even with your skill in the world of sound."

He chuckled, and the sound reassured her.

"What are you laughing about?" she asked him.

"People with eyes," he said. "The blind have an edge on them. We never have to worry when the lights are out or even when they're turned down."

They were close to the edge of the proscenium arch, where Gina had so often made an entrance to take a bow before the great old curtain. To their left was a cubicle in a dented niche about the size of a large clothes closet, set in the edge of the proscenium arch. There, during each performance, a stagehand stood to raise and lower the great gold curtain.

Gina said, "If a dog can lead you, I can, too. Come on. Suppose we try."

Two steps onward, the captain stopped abruptly, as though some giant magnet had glued his feet to the ground. The arm that Gina was holding straightened, barring her way. She peered through the dimness, searching his face, and found it tight and knotted with a worried frown.

"What's the matter?" Her mouth was dry.

"Mind where you step," he told her, and suddenly bent to touch one finger to the floor beside his shoe. Straightening, he held out his hand with a finger extended in a gesture characteristic of him.

Gina moistened her lips and leaned closer. In the feeble light of the night bulb, the tip of his finger looked brown.

"I feel faint," she told him weakly.

He said quite softly, "Go back to the dressing-room and sit down."

For the moment, she could not move. His arms extended before him, he found the door to the cubicle and disappeared inside. Then, hypnotized, Gina followed, groped for a hanging light, found the chain, and pulled it. The captain was standing by a big, red sign, his hand on an empty leather sheath which was fastened to the wall. Close to the sign and the empty sheath, a taut, heavy rope extended from floor to ceiling.

Gina's lips moved numbly, mumbling the words on the sign:

IN CASE OF FIRE USE THE KNIFE TO CUT THIS ROPE TO DROP THE ASBESTOS CURTAIN

The knife must not be removed from here under penalty of the law.

Gina moved one foot, and found that the sole of her shoe was sticky.

The captain said, "I warned you to go to your dressing-room."

Again she found she could not move. Her eyes were held to Jacqueline's slender body stretched out straight in an angle of the wall. The fur of the dark mink coat was matted where the knife hilt stuck up sharply in back, casting a single shadow against the upswept golden hair.

"Look!" Gina breathed, and pointed, forgetting he was blind.

"I don't need to look," she heard him say. The words were tiny, irresistible hammers beating at her through an enveloping dizziness. Gradually they shut out everything and sent her mercifully slumping to the floor.

II

Gina coughed against the sharp, choking fumes of smelling salts and turned her head. The smelling salts followed persistently, scratching at her throat and searing her nostrils. Her eyelids fluttered, and the naked lights of her dressing-table hurt her with their brightness. She shut them out quickly, trying to find blackness again. Firm, gentle fingers closed on her wrist, and a voice muttered something in soothing French to the effect that she was going to be all right.

A hand rested on her forehead. She raised her lids and stared up mistily into the gentle, sympathetic eyes of a seal. No, it wasn't a seal—it was a man in a sleek fur coat, his round, comical face furrowed with worry.

"She's chilled perhaps, *non?*" The man in the fur coat spoke English that was touched with the accent of many languages fluently mastered. There was only one man in the Knickerbocker who lived in a world where the atmosphere remained at a constant point of freezing. That was Michl Soulé.

Gina reached up and closed her fingers around the hand on her forehead and clung to it tightly. The mistiness of her eyes decreased and revealed two other faces floating above the satin couch on which she was lying.

One was Ed Trapper, her manager, his silvery white hair brushed tightly back and slicked as tightly down, his businesslike pale blue eyes under the heavy white brows touched for once with a glint that might have been softness.

The other face thrilled her and warmed her inside. It was a face that depicted joy and sorrow and understanding, with a hint of fiery passion in the delicate set of the lips—things that its owner could wring from a grand piano with a touch of his tapering fingers. The face belonged to Jacqueline Marlowe's latest protégé, twenty-five-year-old Arthur Considine. He grinned at Gina reassuringly, and the grin was as helpful as a draught of golden wine.

"Come, come; snap out of it, Gina baby." Ed Trapper's smooth voice struck against her with fatherly slaps. "You're old enough not to be pulling faints. You're apt to cook your voice for the opening. That would be fine."

"The voice, the voice." Michl shrugged, raising two waves of shimmering fur, then touched his throat above the coat collar with a finger and emitted one clear liquid note. "Always it is the *voice!* Never what is in here." He slapped his heavily padded heart. "It is freezing in this room. Does anyone care for *me?*"

From the other side of the dressing-room Captain Maclain said, "If it's eighty in this place, Michl, it's a hundred and nine."

Gina forced herself to sit up. For the moment she had completely forgotten the captain and Schnucke. His back was toward her. He had shed his overcoat and was standing in front of her dressing table. His sentient fingers flitted from object to object with the delicacy of a gardener testing new buds on a vine.

"Are you looking for something, Captain Maclain?" Arthur Considine's voice sounded strained and hard.

"The police will be here any minute now." Maclain sat down on the bench with his back to the make-up table. "They're naturally inquisitive, but Inspector Davis is a very close friend of mine. The more I know about the room I'm in, the more I can save him time."

The telephone rang. Ed Trapper started forward, but the captain reached around without turning his head and lifted the phone from its cradle.

Gina sat quite stiffly on the edge of the couch and tried to read something from the captain's immobile face. It was strange that a face which could portray so many emotions by a lift of the eyebrows or a twitch of the mouth could remain so impassively blank, staring unseeingly back at her over the phone.

"I'm sorry to tell you that your wife's met with a serious accident." The captain's lips were moving.

Dane! She'd forgotten about Dane.

"Yes, it's serious. You'd better come right down."

The door opened quietly and a man stepped in, closing the door behind him. He backed up against it and traveled the room with his quick-moving eyes. At the sight of Gina he took off his hat. His close-clipped mustache was sandy and touched with gray. He was not much more than five feet ten, but the clever drape of his well-cut coat and his slim, hard-muscled erectness made him look tall.

Maclain said, "Inspector Davis, unless I'm mistaken. Good Lord, Larry, it took you long enough to answer my call."

The inspector removed his gloves, packed them together, and put them in his overcoat pocket. "Have I got B.O. or something, Maclain?"

The captain smiled and shook his head. "It's your footsteps, Larry. I've told you a hundred times. They're unmistakable. I heard you when you came up to the door five minutes ago. You've been standing out there in the hall."

The inspector's eyes were on Soulé. "Are you going or coming?" he demanded, his eyebrows drawn together.

"I am freezing, monsieur," said Soulé, and hunched himself into a ball.

"What's your name?"

Michl unwound, rose, and faced him. "I resent that question, monsieur" he announced with furry dignity. "It proves. one of us very ignorant. I have supported a so-called press agent and his entire family for some ten years. Either I am very ignorant for having supported him, or you are very ignorant for not knowing that my name is Michl Soulé and I sing. In answer to your first question, which I also consider insulting, I am going."

"Where?" inquired Davis.

"To my dressing-room where it is warm enough to avoid encroaching pneumonia. It's across the stage to the right, at the end of the hall. You can find me there if you need anything." He brushed the inspector firmly aside and ambled out.

"Well, I'll be damned," said Davis. He leaned out into the hall and yelled "Be careful you don't trip, Caruso. You'll never get up if you fall."

Inside again, he took out a clean white handkerchief and wiped his forehead. "How many singers are there in this place?" he inquired of Maclain.

"Well, there are three to four hundred people involved in every production," the captain told him. "They're not necessarily all singers."

"They will be with me on the case," said Davis. "And I'm the guy that'll have to interview them all."

Davis, having disposed of Michl, found a toothpick in his pocket and began prodding his clean, white teeth, while he leaned inertly against the wall.

Arthur found a straight-backed chair and perched rigidly on the edge. Ed Trapper looked around and, finding no other place to sit, settled himself on the couch beside Gina.

Trapper, who never could wait long for anything, began to fidget, and finally bellowed, "Great God, man! Why are we wasting time?"

Davis said, "I thought if I waited long enough somebody'd tell me who made that telephone call."

Everyone looked at the captain.

"Dane Marlowe," said Duncan Maclain.

"Her husband?"

The captain nodded.

"Where from?" Davis planted his feet more firmly and slid a couple of inches lower against the wall.

"From Reuben's."

"Who was he calling?"

Gina said, "Jackie and I were to meet him, and I guess he wondered—" She was surprised to find that her voice sounded calm.

"That's right," Arthur put in eagerly. "I drove her down from her house to pick up Gina. We were—"

"Let's take one thing at a time," Davis interrupted. "We won't get any place if I try to listen to you all. Now, let's see. Captain, you answered the call?"

Again Maclain nodded.

Arthur slid back farther on the chair, tugging at his lower lip.

"Are you sure he was at Reuben's?"

Maclain said, "They have an operator there. If you have any doubts about it you can easily check the call. He should be here any minute now. He said he'd come right down."

Someone rapped on the door. Davis stepped outside, closed the door behind him, and was back again in a minute.

"Let's begin at the beginning." The inspector took out a notebook and resumed his task of holding up the wall.

He was staring at Maclain, and Gina was a couple of seconds late in answering when he asked, "You're Gina D'Auria, the opera singer?"

Ed said, "Yes, and she had nothing to do with this at all."

The inspector studied Trapper's white hair, appraised the cut of his pin-stripe suit, and settled on his twenty-five-dollar shoes.

"I'm Edward Trapper, her manager. She's scheduled to open here in a few nights in her grandfather's opera, *Cesare*. Miss D'Auria spent a lifetime training—"

"You've got me all wrong, Mr. Trapper." The inspector raised a restraining hand. "I'm on the staff of Police Headquarters, not a newspaper. There's a woman outside with a knife in her back."

Gina said, "Please, Ed. I'm quite all right," and put her hand on Trapper's arm.

"Thank you, Miss D'Auria." Davis's stern face softened. "Now, suppose you tell me just why Mrs. Marlowe was meeting you here and just what happened."

Gina told him quietly, keeping her hand on Trapper's arm.

The door opened and Dane Marlowe, his face deathly pale, stepped in. He was as tall as Maclain, and as straight and well-knit. A short, black mustache swept up over his wide, straight mouth, giving him a slight Mephistophelian air. Wide, deep-set eyes glittered under slightly curved black eyebrows.

Gina, who had seen him in many moods, was shocked into silence. He closed the door very softly behind him and stood swaying a trifle, as though the wound might have been in his own straight back.

The captain said quietly, "Hello, Dane."

The sound of his words appeared to stiffen Marlowe. In a single breath he blurted out, "I'm glad you're here, Maclain. How about taking this over for me. Have you got any whiskey, Gina?"

Arthur stood up and said, "Here, Mr. Marlowe, take this chair."

Gina went back of the screen in the corner and poured him some whiskey from a half-filled bottle. When she returned to where Dane Marlowe was sitting, he took the whiskey without a word, tossed it down, and gazed at the inspector with a maniacal stare.

"Are you the police?" His voice was cutting.

"Yes," said Davis, and gave his name.

Marlowe said, "Well, if you're in charge, what the hell's the idea of letting her lie out there?"

The inspector said, "I'm sorry."

Dane suddenly broke. He set down the glass and pressed his fingers hard to his eyes. His shoulders trembled. Speaking from between his hands he said, "Hell! I know there are things to be done. But I didn't know how bad it was, and the sight of her got me. Her eyes that were always so full of fun—staring up at me with that frightened stare."

He removed his hands and raised his head toward Arthur: "You drove her down here, Considine. Where were you when Jackie was murdered? This might not have happened if you had been there."

Gina whispered, "Oh, Dane."

The captain spoke as smoothly as rolling marbles: "If you let the inspector handle this, Dane, you'll save a lot of heartaches and headaches. I'm sure you will find him impartial and very fair. Larry tolerates my butting-in because I really try not to interfere."

The inspector said softly, "I'm certain Mr. Considine can tell us why he wasn't there."

Arthur walked to the side of the dressing table and steadied himself with one hand. The captain lit a cigarette, fitted it into his holder, and held it between two fingers. Schnucke glanced up as he flashed his lighter, then settled her head on her paws again, looking up from under at the smoke rising into the air.

"Mrs. Marlowe helped finance my musical education—a loan, no more."

He was struggling to find the right words and Gina wanted desperately to help him. Everything in life was a struggle for anyone as sensitive as Arthur, or for any musician. No matter how he put it, financial help from a woman as beautiful as Jackie was going to sound bad to the practical police.

Davis had it already. "Your musical education?"

"I'm a pianist."

"He's an artist, Larry," said Duncan Maclain. "He takes the steel strings out of a piano and puts in heartstrings. Now, suppose for once you skip riding someone and let him tell his story in his own sweet way."

"I was introduced to Mrs. Marlowe at a concert given by the conservatory where I was studying," Arthur began. "She took an interest in me—"

Dane picked up the glass beside him, looked at it, and found it was empty. "Enough interest," he remarked, quite low, "that up

until tonight I always thought you called her Jacqueline."

Color rushed into Arthur's face, and his hand pressed more tightly on the table. Gina felt her own cheeks grow hot in a wordless protest.

The inspector dug his toothpick out from his pocket again and broke it in two. The snap sounded loud. He examined the pieces as though he had never seen them before, and finally restored them to his pocket.

Maclain took a placid puff of his cigarette and raised his eyebrows enough to attract attention. "I called her Jackie," he remarked, speaking to no one. "Gina called her Jackie. Nearly everyone connected with the opera who knew her called her Jackie. It makes the use of her full name Jacqueline sound quite formal to me." He swung his sightless eyes toward Dane. "Shock is apt to warp our perspective, Dane. Don't you think that's true?"

"If you'd seen her eyes," said Marlowe, "you'd be crazy, too." He left his chair and vanished back of the screen, and returned with his glass half filled with liquor.

Trapper slicked his smooth white hair still slicker and said kindly, "Go on, Arthur; spill it. Let's get this finished. Skip the background and start with this evening. I was in the publicity-room looking at clippings and waiting for Michl when this thing happened. What did you do?"

"Gina was to join us for dinner at Larue. She had to rehearse and couldn't come." He was speaking with mechanical stiffness. "We had dinner together and Jacqueline asked me to come to the house on Fifth Avenue. She was arranging a concert tour for me and wanted me to play several of the numbers."

Dane swallowed half of his whiskey noisily. Arthur stopped with resentment, his face growing darker.

The captain took two more puffs and snuffed out his cigarette. Gina felt that some mental clairvoyance had drawn him a picture of every resentful line on Arthur's face and the antagonistic set of Arthur's body.

He confirmed her intuitive guess by saying, "There's nothing more difficult than being meticulously accurate under stress, Mr. Considine. You have all my sympathy and everyone else's. A murderer not only kills one victim. He invariably reaches out a number of horrible tentacles that strive to crush others.

"Minor facts have become important. You went to Mrs. Marlowe's home and played the piano. The inspector is interested in everything that happened from the time you got there until the time you left—messages, phone calls, visitors, guests, and

plans. I'm merely trying to make helpful suggestions. What, exactly, did you and Mrs. Marlowe do?"

Arthur visibly relaxed under the captain's soothing, and some of Gina's own uncomfortable tenseness left her.

"I was driving Jacqueline's town car. She didn't like to drive herself. We drove uptown from Larue. The maid let us in, and Jacqueline asked if Mr. Marlowe was home. The maid said no, but that he had telephoned and left word he'd call later."

The inspector moved his head a quarter of an inch toward Dane, who said, "That's true."

"We went into the music-room and Jacqueline showed me the original score of *Cesare,* which Gina had lent her. I played part of it for her."

"The tenor aria, by any chance?" asked Duncan Maclain.

Davis tugged his mustache and said, "The night's still young. Let's send for the freezing tenor and get him to sing it. Then we might put in a call for a music critic and get him to give him an interview."

"This part, Arthur?" the captain asked unperturbed, and hummed the little song which had introduced him to Gina.

"No," said Arthur, puzzled. "I don't believe I played that."

"Thank you, Arthur," the captain said calmly. "Go ahead."

"Jacqueline telephoned here three times during the evening. We got no answer."

"I was in the rehearsal-room," said Gina.

The back of her mind was filled with a tiny, tinkling carrousel repeating over and over again the words of her grandfather's little song. Was it playing also in the captain's quick brain? Why had he wanted to know if Arthur had played that song?

"Jacqueline had a caller, a man, about half past ten." Arthur looked at Dane and paused, as though expecting a question that might help him go on.

The captain supplied it: "Did you get his name?"

"The maid who announced him said he refused to give it."

"She was always having mysterious callers—musicians and singers needing money," said Dane.

"Let's hear about this one, Arthur," suggested Maclain.

"I don't know anything about him except that he was a bent old Italian with a lot of matted silver hair. He said he wanted to speak with Jacqueline in private. So I stepped out into the hall and smoked a cigarette."

The captain asked, "You're sure he was Italian?"

"He spoke it," said Arthur.

"Do you?"

"Quite fluently. I stayed in the hall about fifteen minutes, look-

ing at a magazine that was on the table. He did most of the talking, speaking very low, but I didn't hear anything. When the maid showed him out, I went back in again."

"And that was all?" asked Maclain.

"There was something I forgot," said Arthur. "When he came in the room he spotted the score of *Cesare* which was standing on the piano. He went over to it, Gina, and repeated your grandfather's name."

"You say he was bent. Could he have been a hunchback?" asked Duncan Maclain.

"Perhaps. Or very old," said Arthur.

The tiny carrousel stopped its whirling in Gina's brain.

"He was my grandfather's friend." She spoke aloud, her hand clenched tight. With an effort she disengaged her aching fingers and pointed toward the dressing table, flanked by two heavy, framed bronze plaques. Everyone turned except Duncan Maclain.

"He was the best-known sculptor in Naples," said Gina. "His name is Pietro Nucci. When I was a child, he cast those plaques of my brother and me. Grandfather had them fixed to the gateposts of his villa outside of Naples. It was a whim of his to have them there. They were smuggled out of Italy just before the war by Jacqueline at grandfather's request. When she got back from her trip, she gave them to me."

The captain got up and felt the two plaques, tracing their outlines and touching each of the faces with reverent dignity. He turned and said, "They are signed by Nucci."

Davis crossed the room and looked, his eyes held close to the metal. "There are times," he said, "when I wish I had fingers that could see."

The captain said, "Gina, I'd like to look over the room where you rehearsed tonight. I wonder if you'd take five minutes and act as guide?"

Davis asked, "What are you up to now?"

The captain smiled. "This is a matter of music, Larry. You'd better leave it to Gina and me."

She took his arm and led him outside, her thoughts still whirling dizzily. Once again he left Schnucke gazing inquiringly. As the door closed on the others, the captain stopped.

"The rehearsal-room's down this way," said Gina.

"We'll rehearse right here," said Duncan Maclain, and bent quite close. "The blind get funny hunches, probably because they can't see. It's better that I frighten you than to have you found like Jackie." He paused, then quoted softly, " 'The little prince and princess may not be what they seem.' Until we find out

what they really are, you'd better stick close to me."

III

It was after two when the captain's limousine slid to a stop in front of Gina's apartment house on East Eighty-second Street. The quiet neighborhood was dim, and frozen into desertion by the penetrating cold.

Cappo, the captain's Negro chauffeur, left his seat behind the wheel and held open the door.

Maclain said, "I wish you'd change your mind, Gina, and be my guest until this blows over. My partner's wife, Mrs. Savage, has been my secretary for years, and looks after my penthouse for me, too. He's away and we have plenty of room."

Gina set her chin. "I can think of no one in the world who'd want to harm me, Captain Maclain. I'm certainly not going to start jumping at shadows and inconveniencing you."

"You weren't able to think of anyone who would want to harm Jackie," said Maclain.

She reached out and took his hand. "You've been wonderful tonight to me—and to Arthur. I don't think either of us could have stood that inquisition if it hadn't been for you."

Maclain said, "I like your singing. And your bravery, too." He handed her a card. "This is my private telephone. Call me if you need anything. Sometime in the morning I'll probably call you."

"You're not angry with me, are you?"

"Years ago," the captain told her, "I learned that life held two futilities. Trying to change the mind of an artist is one. The second—still more hopeless—is arguing with a stubborn girl."

Cappo aided her across the icy sidewalk and up the steps, and waited while she traversed the darkened vestibule and stepped into the dimly lit hall. Gina thanked him and stood still, her fingers tight about her handbag, until he left and the limousine rolled away.

Once it was gone she found that the familiar old apartment house had unaccountably changed. The long, tiled hall made a narrow path between duplicate marble stairways at front and rear. On each side of the path two blank, impersonal doors faced each other with mute antagonism.

She was beginning to learn what the captain meant when he spoke of horrible tentacles. One of them had already wrapped around her at the very first moment she found herself alone, squeezing her into a frightful depression. She shook it free with an actual physical effort and forced herself to climb the stairs to the second floor. Under the tap of her heels, the marble and

metal rang resoundingly. She clicked down the hallway, found the key in her alligator bag, and opened the first right-hand door.

A scalding bath would relax her, make her feel better, she thought as she crossed to the table to light the lamp.

Out of the darkness a gentle old voice said, "Gina, *carissima,* no!"

She was startled to a point where she couldn't move.

"Gina, *carissima,* I've frightened you. It's Pietro—Pietro Nucci." The Italian words were tender, solicitous, and worried.

She drew the window curtains closely and lit the lamp. The circle of its radiance reached out and stroked the ebony sheen of her piano, high-lighted the gray silk cushions of the English divan, polished the highboy in the corner, and softened the marble of the antique fireplace.

It took her an instant to find the old man, hunched in a chair and half cloaked by the shadows beyond the piano. The sight of him sent pity surging through Gina.

His hawklike face was sunken and wrinkled beneath the silvery hair, but his penetrating eyes still held a twinkle. He wore a thin black overcoat, now rusty and shapeless, with the collar turned high. From the inadequate sleeves, his hands jutted out and clung like delicate claws to the arms of the chair.

"Pietro, darling." She ran and knelt beside him, and suddenly put her arms about his bony shoulders and kissed him with affection. "You frightened me nearly silly, sitting here in the dark like this."

Questions poured out with nervous quickness as she spoke her familiar Italian: "How did you get in? How did you find out where I live? Why didn't you telephone, or come to the opera house?"

She gave him no time to answer, but got to her feet, quickly disposed of her hat and fur coat, and settled herself on the floor at his feet.

He reached out and touched her hair with a bony hand. "Do not be shocked by my appearance, child," he said. "I am an old man and I have been ill. Things have not been easy for us since the war. I have only been in your country a few days. I had your address and Signora Marlowe's. I called you by phone from Grand Central Station, but you were not here. So it was the Signora I first went to see. Then I came here. Your cleaning woman let me in when I convinced her that I was old and harmless, a friend of your grandfather's. I was waiting in the dark for you because the light is very painful to my eyes since I have been sick."

"Poor darling," she said softly.

"I bring you a message from Rodolfo who is dead, child. I am very tired, *carissima.*"

Gina left him, poured a glass of wine, and brought it back to his chair. He sipped it slowly, and his old eyes brightened as she settled herself at his feet again.

"I bring a strange story of plaques, child—the one I cast many years ago of you and your brother. It is very short. Years ago Rodolfo saw that some day another war would strip him of everything. He took those plaques from the gateposts of his villa and brought them to me with much money. I recast them in solid platinum, which I covered with bronze. He took them back to the gateposts and replaced them there.

"When he was in prison, he got word to Signora Marlowe, who secured the plaques and brought them to you. He could trust the guard, who was friendly, to carry the message asking her to bring you family keepsakes, but to tell their value he didn't dare. He didn't even dare put the information in a letter. I doubt that you would have received the letter anyway."

"Platinum," Gina whispered. "The little prince and princess—Grandfather was very clever, Pietro. He finished his opera and in it he put a little song that he used to sing to my brother and me when we were children. The song was to tell us that he had hidden something which we would like very much—usually sweets and cookies, which our governess forbade. He must have figured that some day I might hear *Cesare* or sing in it and that I would recognize the little song."

Gina sighed. "It just so happens that the words fit, too. It was a hint for me if I was smart enough—a hint that might tell me the truth if your attempt to reach me should fail. Still, I probably would never have learned without your coming, if it hadn't been for the insight in a blind man's brain."

The wrinkled face clouded in anxiety. "The plaques. Do you still have them?"

"Yes." She kissed him, and his deep-set eyes were misty.

"My mission is finished, child," he said. "It's time I go."

Gina's attention was divided between his words and a footfall, no more than a scrape of leather against tile, in the hall outside her door.

At the sound, the old man changed. He came to his feet with surprising speed, and his thin right hand flashed up his sleeve, to appear with a shining stiletto.

Gina spoke with infinite patience: "If nobody followed you here, Pietro, the sound we heard in the hall just now was made by a policeman. He's been sent

here to guard me from danger, I'm sure. Put your stiletto away now."

"I'm sure I wasn't followed here." He took his hand from her arm, and the cloth of his coat swished softly. "You spoke of the police and danger, *carissima.* Have I brought you danger?"

She waited impotenty, searching for an answer. Already she was wise enough in the ways of the New York police to realize that after Pietro's visit to Jackie they must want him for questioning in connection with the murder, if nothing else, and would have broadcast a statewide alarm.

Well, let them find him without her help! She believed him and was positive everything he had told her was true. He loved her and trusted her. She certainly was not going to turn him over without giving him a chance. There would be questioning, internment, and perhaps deportation. He would never understand. Loss of faith in Rodolfo D'Auria's granddaughter would leave him an old, old man with nothing to cling to, and destroy the burning spark that had kept him alive.

"Danger?" Determined to say nothing of Jackie, she contrived to make her voice sound light, despite her concern. "I exaggerated, darling, as singers do. I have some jewels, and an attempt was made to break into my dressing-room. My manager, seeing a chance for publicity perhaps, has arranged for a policeman to guard me."

Gina listened but heard nothing. "I think," she said, "that in view of what you have told me tonight, Pietro, it would be best if you left here without being seen, even by the police."

He silently agreed.

Gina went on. "There's a stairway at the back. I will go out first, see that this second-floor hall is clear, and you come out and prepare to go down the rear stairs halfway. I'll walk down the front stairs, making a noise with my heels. Under cover of the noise I make, you go quickly to the stairway in the rear, go down halfway, and wait in the turn. I'll go out the front door, and the policeman will be sure to follow me. Give me time; then you come out, and you're free."

His arms went about her, and for one brief instant he held her close and kissed her.

Gina turned on the light, put on her hat and coat, and turned out the light again. Opening the door, she stepped out unconcernedly. The badly lit corridor was vacant.

She walked to the stairway at the front and noisily started down, alert for any signs of life in the lower hallway. She tried to hear Pietro, but the second-

floor hall was as silent as the one below.

She paused for breath at the landing. Her caution began to seem silly. The footsteps she and Pietro had heard might have been any late homecomer slightly the worse for wear. Racked by strain, for a time she had forgotten that others lived in the building. She put a hand on the banister and went on down.

The downstairs hall was empty. She gave it a glance, tried the front door, and found it hard to open. After some tugging, it came quite easily, wrapping her up in a sheet of freezing wind.

Behind her an unoiled door hinge creaked. That would be the policeman. She knew she should leave without looking, but she had to turn around.

The door of the first apartment on the left had blown open. The dim hall light was enough to show her a man in a camel's-hair coat. He was lying still, with his legs out straight, and his face was quite white. A clouded bruise marred his forehead. The shoes on the man were brown.

The cold knob she was holding slipped from her fingers. The front door closed, with a sigh from the big brass door-check up at its top.

She ran down the hall, screaming, "Pietro, Pietro, Pietro!" and tore up the stairs to the landing.

Not until she had gathered his frail old body up into her arms did she notice the slim stiletto over his heart. The haft was nearly hidden in the folds of the rusty coat. Blood dripped down and matted her furs, as Jackie's furs had been matted.

"Pietro," she whispered.

He looked at her once, and died without a sound.

IV

Sunlight streamed in through the diamond-paned doors of the captain's penthouse terrace and made designs on the office floor. Gina shifted uncomfortably on the red leather divan and tried for the twentieth time to find a restful position.

Maclain reached into a drawer, took out a box, and dumped the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle onto the desk-top before him. His fingers made journeys through the pieces of cut-up wood, tracing outlines, selecting, and swiftly rejecting. Two pieces fitted together, and then a third —a legerdemain too swift for Gina to follow.

Michl pulled at his chair to move it closer, and sank back in quick frustration.

Davis relaxed his somber face. "I've been here a hundred times at least, and I still can't remember that the chairs are made fast to the floor."

"I'd banged into those chairs a hundred times at least," said the captain, "before I found

there was one sure way to keep my guests from putting them in my path from the desk to the door."

He raised his head and turned, as though he might read the expressions of those about him. "Because of my blindness, my office has certain peculiar features. Everything that is said in here is picked up by a detecto-dictograph set in the wall, and recorded on a dictaphone in the adjoining room."

Michl said, "I'll have to watch my singing around here, then. I'm under contract for my records."

Ed Trapper put his pencil away and asked, "What's all that for?"

"My personal use only," said Maclain, "but I felt that, in fairness, all of you should know it before any of us says anything more. You've been most considerate, all of you, in answering my request for a conference, since I'm acting for Dane."

The captain's fingers resumed their task. "Gina was here before the rest of you," he announced, his blind eyes holding the room. "A lot of things may be made much clearer if you hear what she said to me."

Ten pieces of the puzzle were together on his desk, a splotch of color against the polished top, forming an irregular design.

He turned in his chair, selected a record from the rack beneath the dictaphone, and slipped it on the machine. The cylinder began to whirl, the reproducer went down, the captain flicked a switch, and voices came from the radio-phonograph across the room startlingly loud and clear.

Gina sat transfixed, hearing herself as she answered the captain's questions and poured out her story of Pietro's nocturnal visit. The voices ceased, and she found she had wadded her handkerchief into a tight, hard ball.

The captain removed the cylinder and replaced it in its felt-lined case amid a silence deep as the sea.

Ed Trapper broke it: "So those plaques are platinum. Ingenious, what?" He whistled softly. "No wonder there were a couple of murders. Well, at least you have them safe, Gina baby. I know a man who'll get you top prices and have them reproduced in bronze. Until then, you'd better turn them over to me."

The captain swung back to his puzzle. "Mr. Trapper has a knack of getting at the heart of things. It's a pity that two rather violent killings can't be dismissed with such nice simplicity."

Davis said, "At least, we know what the murderer was after," found another toothpick, and gnawed moodily. "He evidently spotted Callahan, whom I sent to guard Miss D'Auria, and lay in wait for him in the vestibule. Callahan came up the

steps and our friend conked him, dragged him inside and into that vacant apartment. Then he must have heard Miss D'Auria coming down the front stairs and he started up the back stairs. But he ran smack into the old Italian. The old man probably got frightened and pulled his stiletto. Only, our friend was stronger."

The captain picked up a piece of the jigsaw puzzle and held it extended before him. "Barring the fact that Gina hasn't the plaques, Davis, that she didn't take them home last night, and that they've disappeared from her dressing-room at the Knickerbocker Opera House, it's as simple as one-two-three."

Trapper started to his feet, his white eyebrows bristling. "But they were gone right after you left, Gina. We went out onto the stage with Davis, and when I looked back into your dressing-room they were gone."

The captain asked, "Who's 'we'?"

Davis told him, "Mr. Marlowe, Trapper, and Considine."

The captain slowly moistened his underlip. "And that left no one in the dressing-room."

"No one," said Davis, "but there was a man on the door."

"The man you left on the door followed us onto the stage," said Arthur Considine.

Ed Trapper turned to Gina: "Good Lord! Is that right? You didn't take them home?"

"I'm quite positive she didn't," said Duncan Maclain. "Two plaques that size would make quite a tidy package, Mr. Trapper, and heavy, too. Gina was carrying nothing but her handbag when she got into my car. I drove her directly home."

Dane Marlowe snapped out, "Whoever took those plaques certainly must have known their value."

"It's silly, isn't it?" The captain fitted another piece into his puzzle. "The murderer finds out a ten-year-old secret known only to Pietro Nucci and Gina's grandfather. This impetuous fellow kills Mrs. Marlowe before she can pass the news on to Gina—"

"Damn' silly," said Davis. "Whereupon, he steals the plaques right from under our nose, and after he's stolen them he hides them away so that he can go make another attempt to steal them from Miss D'Auria's home."

"Maybe you have it, at that, Davis." The captain swept the pieces of his jigsaw puzzle into a box and put it in the drawer. Under Gina's eyes he seemed to lose his radiating quality of human warmth and stiffen like a figure turned to stone.

"Have what?" asked Davis.

"The reason why the killer went to Gina's." The captain was talking to the ceiling. "You know and I know that the out-

standing trait of any brilliant crook is that he can't let well enough alone."

"Then you think this killer's brilliant?" the inspector demanded.

The captain thoughtfully chewed one finger. "It's the sort of thing I might do myself," said Duncan Maclain. "If I killed a woman to get a valuable pair of plaques, and then succeeded in stealing them, I might very well stage a second attempt—*attempt* I said, Larry—particularly if I thought that my theft was undiscovered."

"It wasn't undiscovered," Davis protested.

"Oh, yes, it was," the captain persisted. "You've admitted, yourself, that you and everyone in the opera house thought that Gina had taken the plaques safely home."

"Okay, brilliant brain." Davis stuck out a finger with theatrical emphasis. "Let's be frank, open, and gay, like girls dancing around a maypole. You cloud up your dictaphone disks with so many blind deductions that I'd rather hear the television play *Night and Day*. Just for once, suppose I ask and you answer."

"Those elks' teeth on your watch chain jingle when you wave your finger at me, Larry." The captain leaned back, grinned, and became more human. "Your impetuous method of handling things will probably confuse me no end, but I'll do my best. Take it away."

Davis sank back resignedly, staring at his offending hand. "The killer knew about the value of the plaques. At least, that's what you say. How?"

"From Nucci." The captain locked his hands behind his head.

"Then why didn't he make an attempt to steal them before last night?"

"Because he didn't know about them before last night, Larry. Does that sound okay?"

"It has its points. Go on."

Gina was suddenly conscious of Arthur flushing uncomfortably. He was being gazed at by Ed Trapper, Dane Marlowe, and Michl Soulé.

The inspector was shaking his head. "It doesn't make sense, Maclain, and you know it. Why should old Minestrone keep his mouth shut for ten long years and then start bleating his brains out yesterday?"

"He didn't consider telling his secret to Mrs. Marlowe bleating his brains out." The captain's voice was a monotone. "Servants are much like detecto-dictographs, Larry. Sometimes you don't even see them, yet they unerringly record every word you have to say."

"I have a houseman and a maid," said Dane, "and neither of them speaks Italian."

Arthur Considine left his chair

as though pulled by strings. "It's easy to see what you're driving at." His color had faded away. "I'm sticking to my story. I drove Jacqueline downtown and waited outside in her car until I got worried and went in. Nobody saw me enter, because even the stage-doorkeeper had run inside to the stage. I sat in the hall while Nucci talked with Jacqueline and heard nothing that was said. You know I couldn't have taken the plaques."

"Not unless you were very quick and hid them some place near the dressing-room." The inspector's words were speculative only.

"You know there's no possible way I could have killed her." Arthur's voice slipped into a slightly higher key.

"Not unless you left the car right after she did and ran around to the front of the opera house and got in somehow and out again through the auditorium.

Gina realized her fingers were hurting badly. Looking down, she saw they were clenched to whiteness. There was a door in the front of the opera house, and how many of the cast used it to escape the eye of the vigilant stage-doorkeeper, she didn't know. She did know that she and Ed and Dane and Michl all had keys and that she had given one to Arthur Considine herself. She did know the stage-doorkeeper had said that Jacqueline Marlowe had entered the opera house alone.

Shaking inside, she watched Arthur standing stiff and still, his mouth half open. There was something worse — something that threatened to tear her composure into shattered ribbons. He had a key to her apartment, a key she had lent him so that he might practice on her piano every day.

Maclain began to speak—words that seared like cold dry ice in the midst of her quandary: "Mr. Marlowe informed the inspectors that his wife had willed you twenty-five thousand dollars, Mr. Considine. Did she tell you about it during the evening? It seems that her will was altered only yesterday."

"Yes." Arthur's mouth closed, fishlike, on the single word.

"Did you think it so unimportant that you haven't even mentioned it?"

"Yes." Two bright spots popped out on Arthur's cheeks.

In the corner someone chuckled, and it sent a ripple up Gina's spine.

"You might call me doubly guilty, monsieur. I learned this morning that she willed me fifty thousand. She must have liked me, *non?* Even though we were married for two long years and most unhappy," said Michi Soulé.

More talk and more questions. Were murders all talk and questions? Voices rolled on interminably about Gina, divorcing Pietro and Jackie from any resemblance to figures who had ever lived and breathed, spoken to her, been sorrowful and gay. She became involved in a network of complicated thoughts which held her steadfastly twisting her handkerchief into more shapeless form. Finally she found herself seated at a lunch table with Arthur and Duncan Maclain, wholly unconscious that the others had gone away.

Cappo, a black-faced giant in a starched white coat, served them crabs *en coquille,* which she ate but could not taste, salad, dessert, and coffee. Arthur sat woodenly, resenting the luncheon invitation, which he felt to be a command, pushing untasted dishes away and nervously fidgeting in his chair.

The captain talked, making light of his blindness, explaining how life in darkness could be fun, how books became more vivid, music more alive and poignant, people more interesting when you heard only voices and pictured their owners as actors in a play. He told why he had become a private investigator after losing his sight in the war; of his endless drive to prove to his own satisfaction that blindness had not robbed him of life —that Duncan Maclain was as good as, or better than, any man who could see.

Eating skillfully and finding his food without apparent effort, he chatted of his dogs: Schnucke, trained by the Seeing Eye, gentle as a lace-capped old lady; and Dreist, a second German shepherd which they had not seen, trained for police work—no pet, Dreist, but a powerful weapon which attacked without warning at any hint of danger to his master, fast and dangerous as a loaded sho-sho gun.

Gina forced herself to listen, interspersing comments of reticent politeness. What was he thinking beneath his endless chatter? Was his smile sympathetic or full of amusement at human transparency?

He shifted with the coffee, stabbing out as adroitly as a conversational boxer who has feinted, parried, and at last found an opening to strike through a tight defense.

"You could have killed Jacqueline Marlowe if you had had a key to that door in front of the opera house, Arthur"—footwork with words, a straight, flat punch giving no time for Arthur to resume his guard.

"I have a key," said Arthur.

Gina spilled coffee in her saucer. "I gave it to him. I'm entitled to have friends visit me in my dressing-room if I want them to. There are lots of others who have keys. You don't keep

beating them down, Captain, questioning them again and again."

The rebuke in her voice brought a sober smile to his mobile face. "Sometimes I am most harsh with the people I like the best. I have to be if I hope to outsmart Davis. He's one of the most intelligent men I know. He's already learned about the key. The fact that both of you failed to tell him is sure to annoy him. His methods of questioning may be far worse than mine. I presume you're innocent, Arthur?" His eyebrows arched in inquiry.

"I've never harmed anyone in my life. I don't intend to—"

His stare was challenging.

The captain lifted one hand in a gesture. "Innocent but touchy, Arthur. The police have a job to do. If I can make you mad enough before Davis gets to you, I may be able to save you a lot of pain."

Gina reached across the table and touched Arthur's hand. "Please trust Captain Maclain."

"They think I killed her. They think I murdered the woman who helped me—killed her for money and to steal the plaques that belong to you, Gina."

"They certainly do," said Duncan Maclain. "Maybe you and I had better take a trip up to the music-room of the Marlowe house and start all over again."

V

Gina caught a cab downtown. Winter sun poured through the transparent roof. Under the heady combination of brilliance and snapping cold, she huddled back in the corner, listening in desultory fashion to the talkative driver. The years of rigorous musical discipline overcame her distraction and brought her back firmly to the problems of *Cesare*. There was much rehearsing still to be done. She hummed a few bars of her part, and temporarily murder was far away.

Gina started across the stage, her light footsteps echoing in a hollow resonance which intermingled with the other noises. The heart of the Knickerbocker was under the stage, and the floor was laid on a hollow gridiron of supports checkerboarded with trap doors of different sizes and functions. The resonance was dispelled during a performance by laying down stacks of colored canvas cloths arranged in the reverse order of the acts, so they might be peeled off one by one as the scenes were changed.

The effect of walking on such a gigantic drum brought back Duncan Maclain's remark of the night before while she was waiting for Jackie: "I'm certain I heard her footsteps on the stage many minutes ago. She was crossing with someone else just as Michl started to sing."

With someone else—Gina stopped and stared, horrified, at the door to the little cubicle straight ahead, filled with the first real glimmer of what might be working in the mind of Duncan Maclain. If the murderer had used the key to the door at the front of the house and gone down through the auditorium to hide in the cubicle, Jackie would would have crossed the stage alone.

Someone touched her arm, and she started violently.

A voice said, "Don't take it so hard, Gina. It's done and we can't help it."

She turned to face Dane. He looked tired and wilted, and had lost the spruce appearance and some of the cockiness he had displayed during the morning while interviewing Maclain. The expensive blue suit was dusty and marred by a grease spot on one knee.

Gina said, "You startled me."

"Obviously." He forced a grin which looked ghastly under his waxed mustache. "As I said, you're wrecking yourself. Not that I can blame you entirely, for everything since last night has been startling me."

"I can't forget it, Dane."

"Neither can I, but yet, much as I hate the expression, Gina, I have to remind you that the show must go on. It's your business and mine. Look!" He pointed to the right. "They're setting Act Three of your grandfather's opera. That's the old tower by the water, where the mist rolls in from the sea and hides the dying Caesar as the curtain comes down. I've been supervising the mechanical equipment—a new set of steampipes to bring the mist in from the sea."

He was talking about steampipes and the handle beneath the stage which turned them on, but Gina's mind was far from steampipes as he held her arm and walked her along. It was on footsteps crossing the stage the night before and Jackie pushed suddenly into the cubicle by someone who must have known the knife was there, not to be removed under penalty of the law.

They passed the darkened doorway.

Dane said, "God, I'm tired. I hope all your whiskey isn't gone."

Across the stage the powerful voice of Michl Soulé was raised in a burst of song.

She was glad to find Ed in her dressing-room, and for once found herself welcoming his businesslike censure.

"Metcalfe's been playing Chopsticks on that piano in the rehearsal-room for an hour, Gina baby." Ed's belligerent eyebrows bristled at Marlowe as though Dane were personally to blame for her lateness.

Dane vanished back of the

screen in search of stimulant, and Ed turned his fatherly tirade toward his charge.

"Even if they kill the whole ballet you're still under contract," he began impatiently. "You're not reading lines in a melodrama, Gina baby. You're supposed to be singing an aria. Metcalfe says that so far you've been lousy."

"I'm sorry, Ed. I know I'm late." Gina hung up her furs in the closet.

"Of course," said Trapper, "I can always get you a job if they revive *The Merry Widow* again, or perhaps *The Prince of Pilsen*. If you don't like rehearsing you can always sing a song." He started a restless pacing.

Dane appeared from behind the screen, swallowed half a tumbler of whiskey neat, and said to Trapper, "For the love of God, sit down." He disposed of the tumbler and went out, leaving Ed with a farewell frown.

Gina said weakly, "Ed, I can't rehearse until I've rested half an hour."

He stopped pacing, stared at her hard, and was instantly solicitous, his brusqueness gone. "Lie down, Gina baby. You're better than any of them without any rehearsal. I'll be back in a minute. I'll explain to that Metcalfe clown."

She stretched out on the silken couch and closed her eyes.

A few minutes later Ed came back and sat down. "He'll wait. What's the matter, Gina—Arthur?"

"Partly." She opened her eyes. "He's so helpless, Ed."

"Yeah. What else? Did Marlowe upset you?"

"Oh, this morning, and crossing the stage just now."

"What about this morning? You're not letting that blind man get you down?"

"It's Michl, Ed." Her hands lay laxly beside her.

His keen blue eyes changed color. "Michl? What the hell has Michl—?"

"He never said anything last night about being married to Jackie. He was joking after—"

"He's like that, Gina baby. He probably thought everybody knew it. Pagliacci—he laughs, and hurts inside. He was always like that."

"Whoever stole the plaques knew about their value, Ed."

"What's that got to do with Michl?" He leaned forward, his hands tight on his knees. "You don't think Nucci went to Michl?"

"There was a way Michl might have guessed those plaques were valuable," said Gina. She told him about Maclain and her grandfather's song.

Ed said, "I've managed him nearly fifteen years, Gina. You've got him all wrong. You're trying to cover Arthur."

"There's the fifty thousand dollars, Ed."

"You've got him all wrong. What the hell does he need with fifty thousand dollars and your plaques? He's a big-money singer, remember?"

"There's more, Ed."

"What?"

"A trust fund of two hundred thousand dollars. Jackie set it aside for him after their divorce and kept it a secret."

"Her attorneys would know it, and Dane's."

"No." Gina shook her head. "She didn't want Dane to know it, so she didn't tell her lawyers because they'd be sure to tell him. He was jealous."

Trapper got up. "Look, Gina baby; I don't blame you for breaking your neck to cover Considine. I think you love him. But if there's any such trust fund set aside for Michl I'd know about it, just as I know everything about you and your financial affairs."

"But she told me. She was always fond of Michl, even though they split up. She felt that he was just an overgrown kid and temperamental, Ed, and that she was the one to blame. He spends money like water—"

"While he earns it like wine," said Ed.

"I know," Gina agreed, "but Jackie wanted him to have a backlog. She told me she'd set aside two hundred thousand dollars in bearer bonds for Michl before she married Dane."

"Where?" asked Ed.

"She didn't say, but she did say that if Michl learned about it he would run through it in no time." Gina was plaintive. "Singers do occasionally end up penniless, Ed, even the best of them. I've heard you say so yourself. You keep telling me that it's part of the game."

Trapper shook his head. "You're all wrong, Gina. You just said Michl knew nothing of this fund. Then why in the devil would he want to kill her without knowing he had something to gain?"

"He may have found out."

"I still claim that I'd have known about such a fund," Ed maintained seriously.

"But she told me," Gina persisted.

"All right," said Ed. "She told you, but think about Dane."

"What about Dane?"

"You're trying to point out, Gina, that Michl gets two hundred and fifty thousand dollars by Jackie's death. Dane gets five million. You've said yourself Dane was jealous. I'll tell you something else—he and Jackie had quarreled—at least, she was leaving for Europe within the next couple days, to be gone for months, maybe longer."

"She never mentioned that to me," Gina protested without much ardor.

"Well, it's true," Ed continued. "Suppose he was spying on Jackie and Considine last night. He could have overheard Nucci's conversation. He'd know about the plaques and their value. Maybe he pinched them himself to make it look like Arthur. Those plaques would be a fortune to anyone as broke as Considine. Also, he'd be the first one to hear that Jackie had left twenty-five thousand to her pet piano player."

"Ed, you can't—" His calm, unimpassioned words were engulfing her, dragging her down.

"There's more," he said. "All of us here thought you'd taken the plaques home. Dane could have made a fake attempt to steal them if he knew that Considine had a key to your apartment. He could have run into Nucci in the hall and had to kill him because the old man pulled his stiletto. Think about Dane, Gina baby, and you'll see that you've got Michl wrong."

"Ed!" She sat up quickly. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to the police," said Trapper. He picked up his hat and coat and was gone.

VI

Gina's attempt to relax only made her more tired. She gave it up after fifteen minutes and walked down the hall to the rehearsal-room, to find that Metcalfe was not there. She sat down to wait, strumming idly on the piano.

Gina waited in the rehearsal-room a little longer than ten minutes, then went in search of Metcalfe. If she didn't find the assistant conductor soon she'd lose an entire day.

When she left the rehearsal-room she stood in the wings for a moment, close to the spot where she and Maclain had stopped the night before. There were only two men on the stage now, busy with some piece of construction. As she watched, a backdrop went up slowly into the flies, raised like a window sash by heavy counterweights which worked over pulleys in the grid-iron eighty feet above.

The assistant conductor had a small office off the third fly floor. Gina started across the stage to take the elevator up on the other side.

She had covered a third of the distance when an unseen voice from one of the flies above called, "Joe!" One of the two men working on the stage looked upward just as Gina circled a small chest of carpenter's tools which stood in her path.

It was then that panic *froze* her, and the world stood still at the sight of the guy named Joe. His face had turned into a wild, white mask surrounding two crazy eyes. His wide-open mouth emitted no sound. Running to-

ward Gina, he suddenly flung his heavy body straight through the air, crashed into her middle, and knocked her ten feet backward in a stunnning, breath-taking blow.

Within a foot of the carpenter's tool chest a sandbag crashed with the force of a canvas bomb, raising great splinters from the heavy wooden stage. Men appeared from nowhere, yelling futile curses into the flies above.

The stagehand picked up Gina, who clung to him weakly.

"I'm sorry I had to tackle you, lady," he said contritely, "but there wasn't much time, for when one of them sandbags starts falling it don't fall slow, believe me."

Melody in death! It had started back in childhood and, crawling like an invisible virus, had worked its way along. Since the night before, it had sprouted like the deadly amanita, attaching itself with a fungus growth to her grandfather's little song, and now the opera house Gina loved so well had become a place of danger.

Gina was afraid. She was frightened of Dane Marlowe and Michl Soulé and Trapper and Arthur Considine. She was panic-stricken.

Life had been reduced to one stark fundamental—inertia. She dared not leave the only two men who spelled safety: the tireless, toothpick-chewing inspector, pacing back and forth before the door, and the blind man, who had both of his dogs with him now.

Another stagehand came and went, leaving more answers to Davis's impersonal questions. The ballet rehearsal-room was large. The inspector walked to the farther end, noisily dragging back a kitchen chair too near the door. Gina felt her own keyed-up body relax when he finally sat down. He took out a thin, expensive cigar, bit off the end, and lit it. When it was going nicely, Michl coughed.

"Monsieur, again I beg of you. My throat is unable to stand it. Twice before I have asked you, and you have been so kind as to put them out."

"So you sit there and let me light a third one!" the inspector remarked with poison. "Well, this time you can choke to death." He blew a lungful toward the scowling tenor, who fanned it away protestingly. "It might have been an accident, that sandbag falling down."

"Yes," said Dane. "I remember a similar case in a Shriners' temple seventeen years ago. It turned out that some boys had sneaked up into the flies and were fooling with the rope. Personally, I think a deliberate attempt was made on Gina. With the stage so cluttered, you have to cross near the footlights from wing to wing. That sandbag was

right in line. Anyone waiting up in the flies and watching—"

The captain twisted a music rack with his restless fingers and asked courteously, "Where did you go this afternoon, Arthur?"

"I thought you and Arthur went up to Dane's." Gina moved her hand so quickly to her throat that Dreist's muzzled head snapped up, and the captain ordered, "Down." The dog relapsed.

"I changed my mind," said Duncan Maclain. "I left Arthur shortly after three o'clock and made a trip downtown."

"And you, Mr. Considine?" asked Davis.

"I went to a music store and then to Gina's apartment on Eighty-second Street, where I practiced. A couple of hours ago I called her up for dinner. She told me what had happened here and that I'd better come down."

"The process of elimination is a fascinating thing." The captain resumed his torture of the music rack.

Davis stiffened up in his kitchen chair. "What are you going to eliminate now?"

"Dead wood," said Maclain.

"Is that why you brought that murderous dog?"

The captain gave a pontifical smile. "Dreist? He's not murderous, Larry. He's just efficient. He dives into the center of things, looking neither to right nor left. He'll scale a twelve-foot fence if it's in his path, or go through fire and water to get at a killer who's brandishing a gun."

The inspector chuckled grimly. "I remember once not so long ago when he took a gun away from a G-man. Even at *my* job I occasionally have a little fun."

"Tenacity of purpose," said Duncan Maclain. "He still goes straight at the object in view and ignores the smoke screens."

"I shall ignore one myself, monsieur," said Michl, and pulled his chair to another part of the room.

The inspector's gray eyes followed. "What smoke screens?"

The captain gave the music stand an added twist. "The platinum plaques, for one. No matter how much smoke gets in my eyes, Larry, I still can't see. That leaves me only thinking and listening."

"Listening to what?" The inspector dropped ashes on the floor.

"Questions and answers," said Maclain. "Questions and answers buried deep in a smoke screen of platinum plaques. They've gone round and round like this music stand."

"And my head," said Ed Trapper. "For the love of God, quit twisting that thing! It's getting to be quite a bore."

Dane asked, "What do you mean by saying those plaques were a smoke screen? I thought they were stolen. At least, we all know they're gone."

"Gone for a purpose," said Duncan Maclain. He placed his hands flat on his knees, and the music rack ceased to twirl. "I'll take things in order. We'll dispose of the plaques and of the people, and then of the attempt that was made today to take the life of a girl."

"If it was an attempt, monsieur le capitaine."

"Which I am certain it was, Monsieur Soulé. We will start with a simple premise. Nucci had told Mrs. Marlowe that Gina's two plaques were made of platinum. So far as we know, she died without revealing that fact to anyone. I had a hint of the value of the plaques from a line in your aria, Michl—'The little prince and princess may not be what they seem.' "

"My aria! But what—?"

"I told the captain about it last night," said Gina. "It was a song my grandfather wrote for me and my brother when we were children. He used to hum it to fool our nurse and tell us that he had hidden candy in the piano."

"The devil with the plaques. Let's get down to the people involved. What about them?" The question came tight as a snare drum from Arthur Considine.

"The plaques will lead to the people, Arthur." Maclain leaned down and unmuzzled his dog and twirled the leather mask around his finger. "The plaques weren't stolen. At my suggestion, Davis took them from Gina's dressing-room last night and sent them down to headquarters for safekeeping."

"That was a peach of a crazy idea." Dane moved his chair closer to Gina's. "That lunk of a cop"—he pointed at Davis—"told everyone there that Gina had taken them home. She might have been murdered, as Nucci was."

The inspector's clipped mustache set fiercely in warning. "There are two people living who can call me a lunk. One's Larry Davis and the other's my wife. This happens to be one of the times, Mr. Marlowe, when I'll make an exception. The captain told me to guard Miss D'Auria and watch her apartment. We're shorthanded because of illness on the force. I put one man on a four-man job, and he was half asleep on his feet. If anything happened to Nucci the fault was entirely mine."

"It seems to me the blame rests on the killer," said Duncan Maclain. "Blaming ourselves for what has happened is merely a waste of time . . . We'll go back to our simple premise: Mrs. Marlowe drove from her home down here with Arthur Considine. She told him nothing of Nucci's conversation while he was waiting in the hall. I am coming now to the three people

concerned with known motives for killing Jackie: Dane Marlowe, her husband; Michl Soulé, her ex-husband; and her protégé, Arthur Considine."

Dane Marlowe said, "Now, wait a minute."

"We've waited too long," said Duncan Maclain. "Four persons only were told by Davis that Gina had taken those plaques to her home. None of the four knew their value, and I had only guessed it through a song and chanced it might bear on Jackie's death."

"Did you count me in?" asked Trapper. He got up and stood behind Gina's chair, resting his hand on her shoulder.

"You," said Maclain, "and Michl and Dane and Arthur Considine."

"You now come into the swim, monsieur," said Michl Soulé. "You will find that the water's fine."

"Maybe she's got me down for a hundred thousand in her will," said Ed. "That's all I need to find."

"No," said Maclain. He crossed his long legs and capped his knee with Dreist's muzzle. "I talked to her attorney this afternoon. That's why I left Arthur and went downtown. Her only bequests of importance, outside of Dane's, were those to Michl and Arthur."

"She never mentioned mine to me," said Arthur Considine.

"No," said Maclain. "Nor Michl's to him. There's where we come down to the interesting process of elimination. I'm about to eliminate hours instead of people. By accepting Arthur's story as true, I'll show you she never had time."

"For what, mon ami?" asked Michl.

"To speak of her bequest to you. And of something else that Gina told me when I arrived here late this afternoon—the fact that Jackie was going overseas within the next few days."

Dane said, "But I knew she was trying."

The captain closed his sightless eyes. "Gina knew she was going. Ed Trapper told her this afternoon. You slipped there, Ed. The only person that Jackie could have told that to was the man who killed her."

"You're crazy," said Ed.

"Follow me closely," said Duncan Maclain, "and I'll prove that she never had time. You realized it yourself after you'd talked to Gina—that's why you dropped that sandbag, loosening the rope up in the fly. She mustn't be allowed to tell anyone where she heard of Jackie's departure. It would leave you far too much to explain. It was rather neat, your telling the assistant conductor that Gina wasn't going to rehearse. It made it almost certain that she'd cross

the stage to see if he was in his office."

Gina started to speak, but sat quite still. There was danger in the ballet-room. Ed's hand lay light on her shoulder, but the other was down at his side, and a cold, hard circle of metal death was pressing into her spine.

"Jackie went to her lawyer's at five," said Maclain. "She decided to alter her will, leaving fifty thousand to Michl and twenty-five thousand to Arthur. She also asked if her lawyer knew an auditor who could do some confidential work for her today. I've guessed that it had to do with a secret trust fund which Gina mentioned to me—a fund that Jackie had set aside in bonds for Michl Soulé. Two hundred thousand, wasn't it, Gina?"

She nodded like an automaton.

Ed said, "Rot!"

Davis said, "Let the captain talk."

"Two hundred thousand!" The little tenor shook his head. "Nom d'un nom! Was it worth two hundred thousand to her to be rid of Michl Soulé?"

Maclain went on, "I think those bonds were left with Trapper, as Michl's manager. I think they're gone. I think if Jackie had stayed alive that's what her auditors would have found out today."

"You'll have to prove it," said Trapper.

"No," said the captain, and shook his head. His face looked worn and gray. "She left her lawyer's at six o'clock and had dinner with Arthur Considine. She saw no one else between six o'clock and the time she crossed the stage with the man who killed her. I heard her cross with someone—so, obviously, her killer did not come in the opera house front door. Your story is, Ed, that you were waiting in the publicity-room by the opera house entrance when Jackie was killed—waiting for Michl Soulé. A couple of people saw you there, it's true, including Jacqueline Marlowe as she entered alone."

The captain straightened suddenly and his voice grew stern. "I might take a shot at constructing your conversation. She told you first what Nucci had said about Gina's plaques. But then she told you the thing that made you kill her—the fact that she was leaving for overseas. She was telling you that as you crossed the stage. And of Michl's trust fund that was going to be audited today."

"And what about Nucci?" asked Davis, his hand in his right coat pocket.

"Mr. Trapper overplayed his cards, like most good killers," said Duncan Maclain. "Arthur could have overheard Nucci's story. He had a key to Gina's apartment, and whoever made the attempt to steal the plaques

must have known their value. So Ed made the attempt himself to make it look like Considine. Only, he didn't know that Gina hadn't taken the plaques home. And he didn't know Nucci was there. I'll give him the benefit of the doubt and say that Nucci attacked him and Ed had to kill him.

"If your man Callahan hadn't been so dumb, we'd have had Ed last night and he wouldn't have slipped by telling Gina of Jackie's departure. Michl couldn't have known about it. He was singing in his dressing-room and she hadn't seen him. Arthur's story I believe, for we know she came into the opera house alone. Dane was at Reuben's, so she must have told Ed at the time she was killed. It could have happened no other way."

Ed said, "Stand up, Gina baby," and the metal disk pressed hard. "I have a gun in Gina's back," he told them all. "It's hidden where your dog can't see it, Captain. You're very clever, but a lot like me. You talk too much. It's better now if you let me walk out quietly. I've killed twice already since midnight last night, and I'll kill again if I have to, to get away."

"Ed, you can't get away with it."

"I'm trying."

"You're mad."

"Quite mad, Gina baby. Keep marching." The gun in his pocket pressed strong in her back. "We're going downstairs and out the street door."

"There are police there, Ed."

"Keep marching. Quickly, across the bridge! You're a good actress, Gina. If we meet anyone, start acting. If it isn't good you'll have sung your last song."

VII

The dark, tortuous passage had closed now. Nine-foot walls of sheet iron hid them from workers on the stage eighty feet below. Their footsteps rang. The ballet bridge was narrow and very long.

The house electrician stopped them at the other end. "That was a narrow squeak you had, Miss D'Auria, when that sandbag dropped. I don't understand it. Something must have gone wrong."

The gun in Ed's pocket was pressing close.

"Well, anyhow, it missed me." She hoped her voice was casual.

The electrician wanted to talk more.

Ed said, "We haven't had any dinner. We have to be pushing along."

Instruments tuning in another big rehearsal-room. "Keep marching, Gina. You're doing fine." His voice was low. "Maybe you'll live to sing another song."

Two stagehands on the closed-

in stairs. "Hello, Miss D'Auria. Evening, Mr. Trapper."

Fly floor number four, and a quick look down at pygmies moving about on the stage below.

"They'll stop us, Ed."

"Not while I have you with me." The gun barrel nudged her. "Keep moving, Gina baby."

Fly floor three, and a painter. "That sandbag—"

"Yeah," said Ed. "It nearly hit her. We haven't had dinner. We have to keep pushing along."

"The policeman at the door will stop us, Ed."

"We're going out the front of the house. Keep walking."

Fly floor two. A glance at the stage, much nearer now, and a silent prayer that he hadn't seen a sandbag that was dropping swiftly from up above on the other side. Standing on the sandbag and clinging tight to the strong hemp rope in a perilous ride to the stage below was Arthur Considine.

Dane would have thought of that—Dane, whose blueprint mind was a record of every piece of equipment in the theater. Gina pictured the bank of sandbags hanging close to the fourth floor tier. Even with Dane to handle the rope and play it out with some semblance of safety, it took a man of iron nerve to ride the sandbag down. In one swift instant she had learned a lot about the sensitive Arthur Considine.

She forced herself to turn and look at Ed. His eyes, thank heaven, were on the stairs, his bushy eyebrows set at attention, his forehead creased with a frown. Gina moved swiftly ahead into the shelter of the stairwell, and the stage was hidden from view.

Ed's voice was low in her ear, his breath warm on her neck. "When we reach the bottom of this flight, Gina baby, keep right on going down."

"Under the stage?"

"You got it." The gun edged her on. "We'll cross underneath to the other side and come up there near your dressing-room, then out through the house. Keep right along the right-hand aisle until we find an exit."

They were on the stage level, starting down the narrow stairs which led below, when Arthur jumped from behind with a shout of "Run, Gina, run!"

There was no place to run except straight ahead into that gloomy mass of platforms and pulleys and threatening machines.

Ed's gun fired twice. Arthur sat down on the narrow steps and slowly slumped forward, his talented hands dangling limp and still.

The bullets might well have struck Gina, for her heart seemed to die.

Ed's tone had changed: "Keep going, Gina. That Considine always was a fool. He's only made me kill again."

"They'll close in, Ed. You're trapped here. They'll use gas or something."

"Not with you here, Gina baby."

Footsteps were pounding overhead and voices were shouting: "We've got you surrounded, Trapper. There are men at each of the stairs with machine guns. Send Gina out first and give her your gun and you'll have a chance to stay alive."

Gina said weakly, "Ed, you'd better."

"When we go up, we go together."

They passed a short flight of railless steps, dark, and roofed by a sliding trap in the stage above. She had reached a state where her head was light and terror had made her buoyant.

The voices above were louder. For a moment the gun was gone from her back and Ed was twisting a heavy valve in the steam-pipe. Above their heads the voices were raised, and then grew silent as though in awe.

"Ed, what have you done?"

He was back close to her again, painfully gripping her arm. "I've started the closing scene of *Cesare,*" he told her. "I've opened the steam, and in five more minutes the stage will be thick as a London street with fog rolling in from the ocean to surround the dying Caesar."

He pulled her fast to the railless stairs beneath the sliding trap and held her there while the seconds ticked. The gun pressed into her back again. They ascended a little. Reaching above him, Trapper tugged until a white line showed at the stair-head.

"You'd better help," he warned her. "Dead or alive, you're going up this way."

Gina set her teeth and helped him pull. The trap slid open a yard or more. She looked up into a swirling mist—thick and white and dimming the light of an opera day.

"Stick close," said Trapper, "and don't try tricks."

They made an entrance near center stage, coming up through the floor. Steam swirled about them everywhere, billowing out from the fog pipe hidden in the wings.

The gun pressed close, as both knees buckled beneath her. She flung an arm about Ed's neck, closed her eyes, and let her weight go dead.

For a second he held her, muttering curses, then dropped her roughly, and stepped across her motionless body.

Ed's footsteps sounded loud in her ear pressed close to the floor—the only sounds in the silent house. He had gone ten paces when out of the fog she

heard the voice of the captain say, "Damn you, Trapper, you're walking alone. I've lived in a fog for years, and now I'm coming to get you. I shoot by sound and not by sight. If you've killed that girl on top of the others, I'm going to make you pay."

Ed fired twice through the opera fog, and then, quite close, a big gun banged three shots so quick that they sounded like one.

Someone fell, and she raised her head. A blue automatic loose in his hand, Maclain was standing not two feet away. Dreist left his side with the speed of a boxer's fist and dived through the fog. Another body dropped to the stage.

"Hell, Maclain!" came the angry voice of Davis. "If after ten years you still don't know how well you shoot, you ought to be shot, yourself. Your man's quite dead. Now call off this idiot Dreist, for he's taken my gun away."

Gina got to her feet and found she was staggering. A furry brown bear waddled out of the fog.

"It is cold, petite, by the sea, *non?* And the voice, it is gone." Michl's comical head popped up from the thick fur collar to emit a rusty note. He held out both arms, and Gina crept into their grateful warmth.

"The so brave Monsieur Considine is still quite alive, petite, and will play again his very bad music. A bullet in his arm and thigh." His pudgy hand patted her shoulder, and she began to weep comfortably on the fur of Michl Soulé.

When she raised her head, Maclain was gone. "Where's the captain, Michl?"

"Who knows?" he said. "I have known him long, and sometimes he's here and sometimes—*non.* He hates to kill and he loves life much, as you and I love music."

"I wonder if I could love life so well," said Gina, "if I knew that my life had neither night nor day."

"I doubt it," said Michl softly. "My friend, monsieur le capitaine, is very strong."

blood in the background

by . . . Nigel Morland

So black was Schaefer's crime that hanging seemed almost too merciful. Others thought so too.

WHEN Brodie Schaefer died in jail from tetanus, nobody seemed to mind.

The superstitious claimed that divine justice had stepped in to right the error of a soft-hearted Home Secretary, and the sensible world decided a horrible case was finished.

It had indeed been a horrible case, for Schaefer had chased a small girl with an axe when she had undoubtedly irked and bothered him at his job of tree-felling on a blazing humid day.

The trouble was that Schaefer, owner of a fierce temper, was victim of a dozen contributing causes, and instead of scaring the unknown little girl and leaving it at that, he had caught up with her . . .

The trial was distinguished by the pompous clowning of psychiatrists on both sides until the judge, with implacable common sense, summed up against the accused.

The jury concurred.

In the end the Home Secretary, uneasy at the eminence of the defense psychiatrists, thought

To have created so redoubtable a "gentle sex" sleuth as Mrs. Pym—she has appeared in many novels—is an achievement in itself. But Nigel Morland has a rare talent for making even his off-stage characters seem immediately menacing, and has done so in this minuscule mystery chiller with the greatest of ease, and without a single, illusion-dispelling line of unnecessary dialogue.

it best to recommend a reprieve, and life imprisonment in Thameshire Jail. Even he balked at the peaceful comforts of Broadmoore Criminal Lunatic Asylum.

One year later Schaefer died from tetanus.

H.M.'s Prison Commissioners and the Thameshire County Constabulary were so startled by the prison governor's hints at murder that Mrs. Pym was hurriedly jerked from her assistant commissioner's office in New Scotland Yard, and shot off with orders to clean up the Schaefer mess faster than sound.

She sat in the governor's office, her stolid, solid self—though bleak with rage. The day had grown hot and, mistakenly, she had donned heavy tweeds that morning. She resented the way she had been thrust into the case and Brodie Schaefer, as she saw it, was better dead and forgotten.

Colonel Thaup had no patience for this immoral point of view from an assistant commissioner of police. "He died in my prison, ma'am." His blind blue eyes were chill with annoyance. "There was *no possible way* he could have got tetanus, and it's my opinion that fool of a doctor hastened the end by treating for strychnine poisoning, of all things."

"They're alike," Mrs. Pym admitted grudgingly, "in some ways. I don't get it."

"Dr. Snave, our doctor, is a locum-tenens, acting while Almond, our regular medical man, is on holiday. He's not a bad chap, but not too sharp. Young blood, I daresay; thinking of girls and not his work."

Mrs. Pym doubted it, but admitted that an inexperienced man might have treated tetanus as strychnine poisoning, at first.

She had no patience for Thaup's intention of advising the coroner of Snave's deficiencies, after she met the youthful, haggard and much harassed doctor. He was agitated and apologetic, admitting his inexperience had caused him at first to believe he was dealing with a case of poisoning.

He was almost shaking with alarm when he explained how he had become friendly with Dr. Almond and was permitted to take his place as locum because he was fascinated by prison work. The kindly Almond had willingly pulled a few strings to help his young friend and colleague.

Stern old Jaker, the governor's deputy, grown gray in the prison service, was openly skeptical.

"Schaefer was our star boarder, ma'am," he explained, scorning the thought of death from natural causes. "How could he get tetanus? We've only had him nine months and he was still treated as a special—no contacts, reliable officers to take care of

him, solitary exercise and things like that."

"H'm." Mrs. Pym brooded irritably. "Your usual rule?"

"Not usual at all." Jaker smiled artificially. "He axed little Nancy Evans, didn't he?"

"Evans? Oh, the little . . ." Mrs. Pym paused, staring in astonishment at the wall. "Um, most interesting." She wriggled into an easier posture. "Who saw him?"

"The staff concerned with him, certain proper officials, the doctor, and so on—wash them all out, if that's what you have in mind?"

"I haven't!" her voice was sharp, one of Mrs. Pym's pet dislikes being people who assume knowledge of her thoughts. "Dr. Snave seems a nice sort of man," she said.

"Nice, but not efficient. He diagnosed Schaefer's trouble a bit late, and wouldn't listen to the infirmary sister who didn't think it was strychnine." Jaker sniffed. "Beats me how a doctor could make a mistake like that and not call in help until too late. He'll be thoroughly reprimanded, I can assure you of that."

But the governor's belief in murder seemed to have no basis at all. There was no wound visible through which tetanus bacilli could have entered Schaefer's body. No one had touched him and the only time Snave had put a finger on him was when the man, with watchful warders standing by, had been examined with the help of Snave's stethoscope, an instrument obviously not likely to make accidental wounds or scratches.

Colonel Thaup saw Mrs. Pym in the afternoon of that same day. His face was grimmer than at the original interview. She dropped her bomb with an air of smug complacency. "I know who did it," she said.

"You *know!* Thaup sprang to his feet. "Good Lord! Who and how, then?"

"Snave. Didn't you guess?" She nodded at Thaup's extravagant amazement. "It was planned months ago. He came down here and deliberately palled up with Almond, your regular doctor, until he got him conditioned to accepting a friend and colleagues as his locum tenens. Even his name isn't real. Didn't you spot it?"

"You mean, Snave's a faker?"

"No, Colonel. Dr. Almond would have seen through that one. I spotted it and you should have too. *Snave—Evans.* The old schoolboy trick of reversing a name."

"Not . . . ?"

"Little Nancy Evans's doctor brother. Planning to execute when the State had failed. He confessed to me, admitted the pretense of inexperience to give

the germs time to work. I think, with the execution over, he doesn't care very much any more."

"Then *how?* My best men watched Schaefer and any wound would have been noticed."

"The stethoscope, Colonel," said Mrs. Pym. "At his own request, Snave checked Schaefer's respiration, knowing he was watched. He used the usual binaural stethoscope, but hidden in its mouthpiece was fixed a surgical needle, coated with tetanus spores.

"When Schaefer exhaled—a time when you don't feel things like needles so easily—Snave had his instrument on the patient's chest wall, precisely over a mole, and merely pressed the mouthpiece a little harder . . ."

One of detective fiction's "Big Eight" unravels a crime conundrum fascinatingly historical, amidst the Imperial Guard magnificence of the Second French Empire

THE BLACK CABINET

By JOHN DICKSON CARR

A diabolically clever crime syndicate "frame man" tangles with the inner citadels of the Law in a skillful, frighteningly believable mystery thriller

THREE'S A SHROUD

By JOHN D. MacDONALD

in the next SAINT

a present for christmas

by . . . Robert Arthur

Purvis had mistaken ideas about Christmas. He thought that Santa Claus should wear a murderer's smirk beneath a convict's pallor.

Your name is Purvis—Edward Purvis. You're in your late thirties—a solid man, with a cold solid face and small, unwinking eyes. Just now you're crouching in the darkness beside a massive chimney on the broad, flat roof of an old building in the city slums. From time to time you stamp your feet in the light snow. It's Christmas Eve, and it's cold, and you've been waiting for an hour. But you know you won't have to wait much longer.

The children on the floor below have begun to sing Christmas carols, and the thin, high sweetness of their voices rises into the wintry night, reaching you with sharp clarity except when the roar of a passing elevated train, rushing by in the street well below the roof level, drowns them out. Yes, it can't be long; the children are on their third carol now . . .

Silent Night, holy night,
All is calm, all is bright . . .

On Christmas Eve hardened criminals have been known to take a sober look at themselves, break down and contribute generously to the Widows and Orphans Fund. But in this starkly realistic story of a criminal without a single redeeming trait Robert Arthur has chosen to go against the stream, so to speak, and your immediate reaction may be one of shock. But we're sure you'll forgive him, for so powerful and exciting is the drama of absolute justice depicted here that it sets an enviable precedent in contemporary crime fiction.

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PURVIS shifted impatiently. He was warm and sweating inside the heavy sweater that he wore beneath his suit coat. He wore no overcoat. He didn't have one, and if he had, it wouldn't have been suitable to cat-footed creeping across roof tops. But though the wind, when it came, was raw, and the night was crystal sharp with the snap of a real Christmas Eve, he was sweating. Sweating with impatience, maybe, because the blood was running so hot in his veins.

"Round yon Virgin mother and Child . . ."

Below him was a gymnasium. Though he could not see through the snow-covered, gravelled roof under his feet, he knew it. Because this was the building of the St. Francis Foundling Home, and Ed Purvis had been a St. Francis orphan.

"Holy Infant, so tender and mild . . ."

But that had been a long time ago, before Purvis had become a member of a teen gang, then a youthful mugger, then a dope peddler, and finally a killer.

Now it was only important because it meant he knew the building thoroughly. Knew the shabby gymnasium below where a hundred parentless children were singing, joyously, as they waited for Santa Claus. Knew the fire escape that angled down the side of the building next to the "El" tracks, past the long frosted glass windows.

And especially because it meant he knew how to reach this roof from the roof of a building three numbers away—exactly how to reach it unseen and unsuspected, so that he could crouch in the shadows with a loaded gun in his pocket, and a tape-wrapped length of pipe in his gloved hand, waiting, like the kids below, for Santa Claus to come.

"Sleep in heavenly peace, Sleep in heavenly peace!"

That needs explaining, doesn't it? Yes, of course it does. Because it's a somewhat complex series of events that has brought you here to the roof to St. Francis Foundling Home on Christmas Eve, Ed.

So let us shift time and space about a bit. Let's turn the calendar back to early December. And now the scene is the State Penitentiary, a hundred miles to the north. It's Visitor's Day. And you, Ed, have a visitor. You're a convict, you're not free and you don't expect to be. But you have a visitor. A girl. Her name is Red. Just Red. Your girl. It's foolish of her to love you as desperately as she does. But that's how girls are . . .

They sat at one of those long tables with the little fence down the middle and stared at each other hungrily. Purvis' square, brutal face was set and tight. Red's face was white and pinched with too much rouge on her cheeks to cover the pallor and too much lipstick on her lips. But her eyes were dark and sunken, needing no eyeshadow, a look in them of fierce yearning.

"Ed, honey," she whispered. "Ed, honest, I'm doing everything I can. You know, Ed, I want you out of here just as much as you want to be out. You know how I miss you."

Her eyes, as she spoke, proclaimed her desperate sincerity. He was a killer, but she was his girl, and she wanted him back.

"Money!" Purvis rasped. "That's all it takes to get a wiseguy out of this joint. Four or five grand. Nothing else! If the boys—"

Red shook her head, her lips tight. "Ed," she said huskily, "the boys can't. McElroy got them. He killed Willie Rand and wounded Nick and Gander Johnson. They're waiting for sentence now. They'll get ten to twenty."

Purvis' face darkened. "McElroy!" he whispered. "Smiling Jim McElroy! That copper! Some day I'll—"

"Ssh!" Red warned sharply. "The guard will hear you. What I wanted to tell you was this. Lippy's left. Lippy and me. We managed to raise a thousand dollars. That's all.

"I took it last night to you-know-who on the Parole Board. I told him it was all I could raise. He wanted four grand. But I promised him more after you're out. He said he'd do what he could.

"I don't know if he means it or not, but it was the best I could do," she added desperately. "Oh, Ed, I want you back so much—"

There were tears in her eyes, winking bright, as she leaned as close as the little fence would let her. "Ed, the Board meets tomorrow. You'll go up before them. You've been here three years now. Surely they'll let you go! I got to have you back, Ed. I'll die if you don't come back to me soon!"

Purvis drummed softly with thick knuckles on the wooden table. His face was still dark with the congested blood of anger.

"Okay, Red," he said. "If that's the best you can do, that's the best. Even if it works out, it'll mean I'm here another thirty days at least. But when I do get out, there'll be one cop less who wants to see me fry. McElroy!"

His voice lowered, but in a whisper it was still savage. "I'm going to kill him, see, Red? I'm going to choke him with my own hands! I'll strangle him until his eyes bulge, and his

tongue sticks out of his mouth and he wants to beg for mercy but can't! I'm going to kill that copper if it's the last thing I ever do!"

Red shook her head frantically, so that the cheap permanent came loose and her hair straggled down her face.

"No, Ed, no," she begged, brushing it back. "Don't say that. Don't even think it! They'll get you if you do it, Ed, and they'll send you to the chair. They'll take you away from me, not for just a few years, but forever! Forever, Ed! And that'd kill me. That'd—"

"Aaaaahhh!" Purvis said, and it was like a long strangled curse deep in his throat. "Not me, they won't. If I could only get loose from here, Red, only get loose from here before Christmas, I'd show them."

From his pocket he extracted a folded newspaper clipping, raggedly cut from a newspaper with a thumb nail.

"Look at this," he said.

He raised a hand, and the attendant guard ambled over. Suddenly Purvis' voice was mild.

"Can I show this to the lady just for a minute?" he asked. "It's only a newspaper clipping about a friend of ours."

The guard scanned the clipping and grunted. "Okay," he said. "Against the rules, but there ain't anything harmful in it, I guess."

He passed the clipping to Red, and the girl spread it flat and read it. It was just a headline and a few inches of text.

SANTA TO VISIT ORPHANS

Santa Claus will visit without fail this year the St. Francis Foundling Home, on Melton Street. Not always has he stopped there on his annual visits, but from now on his yuletide presence will be assured, thanks to Sergeant James McElroy, of the local police department, who took an interest in the institution when he and his wife adopted a child from it recently.

Smiling Jim McElroy, as he is called, is the most popular man in the department, and among the most courageous, as was evidenced by his recent exploit of apprehending two fur-loft thieves and killing a third. So the response of the department when he took up a collection to buy toys for kiddies who might otherwise go unremembered was generous.

Thanks to Smiling Jim, no kiddie in the St. Francis Home will be neglected on Christmas Eve. Santa will be there on schedule, and will even come in through a real fireplace, and leave by the same route. Under Sergeant McElroy's expert direction, a large imitation fireplace has been erected in the gymnasium, in front of a window that leads to a fire escape.

Dressed as Saint Nick, Sergeant McElroy, some time before midnight on Christmas Eve, will descend the fire escape from the roof, emerge through the fireplace, and delight the hearts of a hundred parentless tots with presents from the pack on his back. Needless to say, the pack will be of ample dimensions.

There was more to it, and a picture of a large man with a square chin, level gray eyes, and a wide generous mouth that seemed made to grin good-naturedly. The girl read it all quickly. Then the guard handed the clipping back to Purvis and moved away again to his post.

"I don't understand," she said. "What—"

"Don't be dumb," Purvis exclaimed impatiently. "Don't you remember—I'm a Saint Francis orphan myself. I didn't have any Santa Claus bringing *me* presents down a fake chimney, like those dirty-nosed brats will. I got thrown out on my ear when I was twelve, and thrown right in again—into the reformatory. But that isn't what I mean.

"What I mean is, I know the St. Francis home like I know the back of my hand. And if I was on the outside, I'd be there waiting for McElroy when he came out on the roof dressed as Santa Claus and started down that fire escape. I'd be waiting, and I'd wipe the smile from his face and escape, and nobody would ever know who did it. If you custom-tailored a bump-off, you couldn't arrange one that would be any easier. Catch on?"

Red nodded. "Yes, Ed," she said pleadingly. "But please, Ed, please don't think about it. I know McElroy sent you up, I know he broke up the gang. But think how lucky you were he only got you for concealed weapons. If he'd ever found that witness he was looking for, the one who saw you kill the watchman, you'd have gone to the chair. Think how lucky you were, Ed, and forget about hating McElroy. Forget him, *please!*

"Tell me what you'd like for Christmas instead. Tell me what you'd like, and I'll send it to you. We'll just think about each other this Christmas and pretend we're together like we will be when you get out."

"He's still looking for that witness," Purvis said implacably. "Some day he'll find him. And so he has to die. If you want to know what I want for Christmas, I want McElroy's life. That's what I want."

"Oh, Ed, Ed," the girl cried, the tears wetting her thin cheeks, "you'll get out and kill him and they'll catch you and take you away from me forever—"

"Time!" the guard said curtly. "Time's up. You gotta go, lady."

Red went, still weeping, and Purvis put the clipping back in

his pocket and opened and shut his hands softly, thinking of what he'd do if only he were free to do it.

Well, now you're free, Purvis. Free to hide on a snow-covered roof on Christmas Eve, and stare at the crimson reflection of neon signs in the uptown sky, or at the glassless window of the tenement across the street where, from time to time, a cigarette tip glows in one of the empty upper windows. Free to crouch there waiting for Santa Claus, a St. Nick who will be Jim McElroy dressed up in crimson pants and false whiskers.

And when he comes you'll be able to give McElroy the present you've brought him—the present of death . . .

It had been completely unexpected when the guard had come for him only that morning and said the warden wanted to see him. Purvis had stood scowling in the warden's office, wanting to be insolent, but not quite daring to speak his mind, while the little man behind the big desk stared at him with level, frosty eyes.

"Purvis," the warden said, tapping the desk with a pencil, "You're surprised to be here. And I'm just as surprised to see you before me."

He smiled bleakly. Purvis waited, wondering.

"We're both surprised. And frankly, for me the surprise is unpleasant. But the Parole Board has granted your request, and ordered me to turn you loose. You may regard it, if you wish, as a Christmas present from the state."

Purvis' heart leaped. The thought of parole had dominated him night and day. But he had hardly expected to get it, for the Parole Board had been none too friendly. But Red had known; she'd been tipped off. That was what she had meant, then, by the letter she'd sent, the letter in his cell now.

Dear Ed:

Just to wish you a merry Xmas and to say that we're preparing a swell present for you, something you want very much. Can't tell you now, but you'll know soon and you'll be tickled. I know you will.

Love,
Red

She'd meant the parole, of course. The thousand bucks to the crooked Board member had turned the trick, and he must have told her so. Naturally, she couldn't pass the news along to Ed in a letter. No one was supposed to know the decisions of the Parole Board until they were announced, and it wouldn't look good for a prisoner to hear in a letter something he wasn't sup-

posed to find out for a month.

But she'd wanted him to know he'd be free soon, though she could hardly have guessed it would be this soon.

"You see, Purvis," the warden said, "it was the thought of the Parole Board that since you were going to go free, it would be a nice gesture to free you in time for the Christmas festivities. Well, you know and I know how much you deserve freedom. But I have my orders, and I have to obey them. Remember, though—"

There was a lot more—guff about parole regulations, working, reporting monthly, and being subject to re-imprisonment for association with former companions.

It went in one ear and out the other. In an hour, formalities having been expedited by the unexpected order, Purvis and half a dozen others were on their way to the city.

Once there, he had wasted no time in issuing stern injunctions to himself. A room, rented in a good neighborhood, first. Then hole up there until after dark. Don't even try to get in touch with Red. Don't risk being seen by newspaper reporters who might follow for a story, or dicks who might think it a good idea to tail a parolee on general principles.

"No, he'd hole up in a respectable room until dark. Then he'd make a cautious sally to a certain number where a guy could rent a gun for the ten bucks the state had given him as a goodbye present.

After that a catlike approach to Melton Street, through back alleys and backyards. An unseen entrance into an empty loft building. From the roof of that across to the roof of the Saint Francis Foundling Home. Then nothing to do but wait.

"Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled!"

Purvis cursed under his breath as the cold bit at his nose and ears. But he could wait. He'd waited a long time, and as his revenge came closer and closer, it tasted better and better. McElroy would be along any minute now, all tangled up in red pants and loaded down with a sack of toys. He'd come right past this chimney, never dreaming of what was waiting behind it for him. He'd come by, and Purvis would raise the taped pipe, bring it down—

He straightened. Was that a footstep? As he strained his ears the "El" thundered by in the street and drowned out any noise he might have heard. When it had gone, leaving his ears ringing, he listened again.

This time it was clear. Foot-

steps, muffled by the snow, were unmistakably coming toward him.

"Hark the herald angels sing . . ."

Purvis tensed. Then the figure he had been waiting for appeared beyond the obscuring bulk of the chimney. Santa himself, with his bulbous stomach, baggy pants, fluttering beard, and tasseled cap. Santa, with a lumpy pack on his back, stepping jauntily across the roof, shaking a little string of sleigh bells in his hands to make the kids below think he was stabling his reindeer.

"Glory to the new-born King!"

Purvis' lips twisted. The pipe descended. A sound like a customer thumping a ripe watermelon was lost in the night, and with a little surprised jangle of sleigh bells Santa stopped, his knees buckled, and he slid silently face downward on the flat stone roof.

Purvis loosened the pack of toys and set it to one side. Then he rolled the unconscious figure over and ripped loose the false whiskers. From his coat pocket he took the flashlight he'd brought, and, muffling the beam with his hand, shined it on the unconscious man's face.

"Now, McElroy—" he began and stopped.

The man on the roof was not Smiling Jim McElroy.

Hideous disappointment rose in Purvis, so acute he could taste it. Disappointment and rage. He clicked the flashlight on again for a moment. But the beam of light still showed a face he did not know. It was a round face, a red, jolly face, but it was not the face of McElroy.

Purvis thrust pipe and flashlight back into his pocket.

Kneeling, he savagely slapped snow into the face until the eyes fluttered and opened. Then, his features hidden by an upturned collar, his voice muffled, he snarled a question.

The open eyes fluttered vaguely.

"McElroy?" the man in Santa Claus costume said in a gasping voice. "He's downstairs. Asked me to come along—play Santa—fool the kids. Thought they'd know *him*. Wanted it to seem—real."

The eyes closed. The voice stopped. The man he had hit was unconscious again, breathing with thick, stertorous gasps.

"God rest ye merry, gentlemen . . ."

Purvis knelt there beside him and cursed. McElroy had made a last minute change in plans. So the kids would believe Santa

was real! He'd be down there now, safe and sound in the brightly lighted gymnasium, surrounded by half a dozen women and a hundred brats—there were no men connected with Saint Francis, except the janitor—helping 'em sing the carols Purvis had been hearing for the last half hour.

"Let nothing you dismay . . ."

And then Purvis was suddenly calm again.

McElroy was down there, surrounded by dames and kids. Unsuspecting, unarmed. Suppose Purvis slipped down the fire escape Santa had been about to descend. Suppose he came out from that fireplace into a room full of startled kids and before McElroy could even—

No, wait! Suppose Santa himself came out from that fireplace, as everyone expected him to? Suppose that Santa, pack on his back and everything, came out and walked over to McElroy and said: "Here's a present for you, copper, that I've been waiting a long time to give you!"

Then the thing in Santa's hand would smoke and flame, and McElroy would go down with a bullet in his heart and death eating at all his stalwart strength. And Santa Claus would scram—right back to the North Pole itself, as far as anybody would ever know.

"For Jesus Christ our Savior . . ."

Back through the fireplace, out the window, down the fire escape. At the bottom a weighted length of ladder swung above a dark alley. Down that length, down into the alley. Rip off the Santa Claus suit, stuff it into an ash can, and be gone into the darkness before the dames and the kids stopped screaming. Be back in his room all the way across town, perhaps, before they even had the sense to call the cops.

What could be easier? He could kill McElroy that way in view of a hundred witnesses, and the Santa Claus outfit would be a perfect disguise.

"Was born on Christmas Day!"

Quickly he set to work to strip the costume off the unconscious man at his feet. The guy had a suit on underneath. He wouldn't freeze. Not that Purvis cared. He got the coat, the pants, the beard, and the cap, letting the boots go, and in the darkness hurriedly slipped into them.

His heavy build fitted the garments well enough. Attired, he took the unconscious man's handkerchief, necktie, a torn-off shirt tail, and with these bound his wrists, his ankles, and gagged him. They'd find him soon

enough. Purvis could have killed him but it wasn't worth his time. He hadn't seen his attacker. And bigger game was below, down that fire escape and the dames and kids couldn't stop him.

Purvis shouldered the pack, got it steady on his back, and made sure his gun was ready. Then he picked up the little string of sleigh bells and jangled them. At the shrill tintintabulation they gave off he grinned, and stepped over the roof coping onto the fire escape.

"Reindeer, huh?" he said aloud. "But the guy who drives them carries a scythe, not a pack of gifts."

LIPPY, a little man with a large, loose mouth and ferret eyes, crouching at the glassless window of the building across the "El" tracks from the Saint Francis Home, heard the childish voices of the singing orphans rise on the night air and grinned.

"It came upon the midnight clear . . ."

"The kids are a little early," he remarked. "It ain't hardly nine-thirty. But they're right about its coming. Any minute now."

He coughed. The room smelled of paint and plaster, and since there was no window in the frame, it was bitterly cold.

"Hasn't he come yet?" the girl asked tensely. She ground a cigarette beneath her shoe and tossed it out the window. "Oh, I wish he'd come. I want to get this over with."

"That glorious song of old . . ."

"We don't have to do it if you don't wanta," Lippy said, and pulled his coat tighter about his throat.

"Yes, we do!" the girl whispered shrilly. "We have to do it. We have to!"

"Well, if we have to, we have to," Lippy said. "Personally, if it's got to be done, we couldn't think of no better way. Here we are in a building no one else is in, not thirty yards away. Nobody to hear us, nobody to see us come or go."

"Then there's the 'El.' A train's bound to go by at the right time. We couldn't want a sweeter setup."

"Oh, I don't want to do it," the girl half-sobbed. Then her voice stiffened with desperate resolution. "But we have to, Lippy! We have to, don't we?"

"Yeah, I guess we do," Lippy agreed, and turned his attention again to the building across the street where a fire escape cut a black spidery line past tall lighted windows.

"From angels bending near the earth . . ."

"Hey!" he said suddenly. "Listen!"

They both heard it plainly—the little jingle of sleigh bells. Then they both saw the figure that appeared above the roof coping across the street, silhouetted for a moment against the sky—the bulbous-stomached figure with the beard, the tasseled cap, and the pack on its back, starting carefully down that spidery black fire escape toward the lighted windows below.

"Here comes a train," the girl whispered shakily.

"I hear it." Lippy flung away a cigarette and kneeled at the window. "He'll get opposite the first window just as it comes by," he announced.

"To pluck their harps of gold . . ."

Then the downtown "El" train came roaring along, and suddenly it was opposite them, filling the canyon of the narrow street with thundering sound. And at the same moment the bulky figure on the fire escape opposite became silhouetted clearly against the first lighted window.

Red leaned forward, her throat so tight she could hardly breathe. Unhurriedly, Lippy lifted the rifle in his hand to his shoulder, gave a little *mmm,* and tightened his finger. A tiny pencil of flame leaped outwards and was gone. The noise of the shot was sucked away by the roaring elevated express.

But across the street the figure on the fire escape was swaying, tottering. Then it fell. It fell headlong down the iron steps, the pack on its back splitting open and tumbling small white packages into the air like a flurry of monster snow flakes.

The somersaulting figure rocketed against the guard rail of the fire escape and went over, plummeting downward.

From the street below came a solid crunching sound. Then, with eerie macabreness, a startled jangling of sleigh bells as the little strip of bells fell beside the dark spot there in the snow in the alley far beneath.

Then—nothing.

Lippy took the gun apart swiftly, put it in a gayly wrapped package that looked like a Christmas present, and moved toward the door.

"Come on, Red," he said. "That does it. There's our Christmas present to Ed. Just what he asked for—that damned copper McElroy's life."

Red followed him. "We had to do it," she half-laughed and half-cried, hysterically. "We had to. Ed himself told me how easy it would be to do tonight, and we had to do it. Because we'd never get another chance. And because if we didn't kill him, Ed would, when he gets out.

"But now he won't have to. Now he won't have to kill McElroy. And so they won't take him away from me. Because we did it, and now Ed will be with me always and they won't take him away. We'll just be happy together, like I've always wanted to be, and I'll have him forever—"

Then her sobbing voice was gone too. Only the children's voices were left, singing in the stillness of the night.

"Peace on the earth, goodwill to men,
From heaven's all gracious King;
The world in golden stillness lay
To hear the angels sing."

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SD 61

the ghost of a dog

by . . . Richard Sale

Spectral photography wasn't at all Daffy's specialty — until Death and a white spaniel made him trigger-happy with a camera.

IT WAS about five P. M. on a Friday evening and I was cleaning up my desk in the city room of the *New York Chronicle,* our fair town's best (self-proclaimed) newspaper, when the telephone buzzed a couple of times in its merriest tune.

Dinah Mason, the light of my life, was standing by the desk at the time. She looked ravishing and she looked hungry. When she heard the phone speak its piece, she scowled darkly.

"Don't answer it," she ordered. "You've invited me to dinner and I intend to eat. From the tone of that musical chime, it sounds as though the Old Man had plans to send you garnering news."

"On the other hand," I returned blithely, "it might be a pair of lawyers calling to inform me that my long lost uncle has passed over and left me his estate of a hundred thousand dollars Mex. It is a code of the Dill family never to turn down a telephone call. If you will kindly attend—" I picked up the handset and said hello.

Before Richard Sale went to Hollywood and concerned himself with blondes and bullets and scoundrelly nephews on stagesets lavishly panoplied he created two unforgettable mystery fiction characters—Candid Jones and Daffy Dill. Of the two we think we like Daffy the best—he's always so irrepressibly himself. And here he is at the top of his bent, in a dark house mystery thriller.

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Originally published as "GHOST IN C-MINOR."

Dinah—unhappily—was correct. It was the Old Man, that bald-headed little gnome who city edits the *Chronicle*—who sits behind his desk with a dark green eyeshade down over his face.

"If I am speaking with D. Dill, he opened sardonically, "it is merely to say that his presence is required quicker than he can present himself."

"If you will glance at the mechanism you call a clock which rests on the southwest corner of your desk," I replied with fervor, "you will note that Eastern Standard time says five o'clock—which same is the hour that said Daffy Dill stops working and begins to play."

"Ha-ha!" the Old Man chortled sadly. "That was very funny. Even odd. I ask you to consider the human wreck lounging across the street by Pier Twelve. You can see him from your window. That is what unemployment does to a guy. Get in here fast or it's your neck."

"But I've got a date with Dinah for dinner and she'll disown me if I don't keep this one."

"I wouldn't give a damn if she decapitated you. I've got a yarn for you to cover and—"

"Okay!" I snapped. "And I hope your next herring bone has a slow passage through your Adam's apple."

"May the levees that hold the water off your brain have a weak moment," he finished, and slammed the phone insultingly back in its cradle.

Dinah and I shrugged at one another. I got up, put on my hat and coat, and we both went over to the Old Man. He said hello brusquely. "Never mind the black looks, Dinah," he said. "There'll be plenty of time for the free dinner."

"Thanks," she said dryly. "Free for me or for Daffy?"

"Never mind that," countered the Old Man. He turned to me. "Do you know what this is?"

"Why," I asked, ogling at the black object which he held up. "It looks like one of those things that takes pictures."

"It's a camera," agreed the Old Man snappily. "It's a speed Voltex with an expensive synchronizer, lens Tessar, also expensive, and a focal shutter with speeds from one-tenth to one one-thousandth of a second."

"Very interesting," I said. "I have a Brownie snapshot camera myself which I bought when every little Ford was a model T. Sometimes it makes pictures."

"You're going to operate this machine tonight," barked the Old Man. I'll make it as simple as possible. I've set the shutter at one-fiftieth of a second, same timing as the photoflash bulb. All you have to do is sight through this range-finder and when you see what you're shooting clearly, press this lever and

you'll have a picture. The lens is already stopped to f-eight."

"My friend," I replied suavely, "I am a newspaper reporter. I garner news, not pictures. If you want pictures, use a staff fotog. If you want especially good pictures, hire Candid Jones to shoot 'em. If you want no pictures, I'll handle the camera."

The Old Man sighed and rubbed his hand across his face. "This isn't the time to clown around, Daffy. There's a good yarn in this thing and if you can get anything at all with the camera, it'll be terrific."

"What is he supposed to shoot?" Dinah asked, curious.

"A ghost," answered the Old Man calmly.

There was a long silence. Dinah and I stared at him. The Old Man is not superstitious and hardly a romanticist. He was as cynical an old guy as had ever been spared by the buzzards. There wasn't an ounce of flumduggery in his skull. There wasn't an ounce of tomfoolery in his makeup. And it was plain that he was absolutely on the level.

"A g-ghost?" Dinah faltered. "You don't mean a real g-ghost?"

"A real ghost," said the Old Man. "Remember, Daffy? The last time we had ghosts in the *Chronicle* was when old Major Culpepper came back from the grave with his thirty-one caliber grave-scratcher. That was a phony. Maybe this is, too. I don't know."

"For a possible phony," I said, "you take it pretty seriously. What is all this anyway?"

"It begins with Walter Nurbeck," said the Old Man. "You know—the big-game hunter who brings 'em back more or less alive. I know Walt pretty well myself. After his last trip to Malaya, he delivered a cargo of animals to the Rachenback Circus quarters out on Long Island. He was pretty much fed up with traveling around and figured he'd stay in New York for a spell until the winter was over."

"Go ahead."

"Now you may remember something about Walt Nurbeck. He was married to Gloria Canova about fifteen years ago."

"Gloria Canova, the actress?" Dinah breathed reverently.

"That's the one," said the Old Man.

"But she disappeared about eight years ago!" I said. "I remember all that fuss. I was a mere stripling at the time, but it had the country gaga. Nurbeck was in Africa at the time."

"Here's how it happened," explained the Old Man. "Walt was in Africa on a job for the Natural History Museum. His wife was playing in 'The Taming of the Shrew,' a revival at the Broadhurst Theater. She came home from the theater this particular night with her agent,

Karl Anderson, and her producer, Philip de Mare. They were sitting in the living room and the maid was serving them liqueurs when suddenly Miss Canova rose, said she was going to change her clothes, and went upstairs. She never returned!"

"I remember," I said.

"I don't want to remember," Dinah said, shivering. "What happened to her anyhow?"

"I wish I knew," said the Old Man wistfully. "It would make a sweet yarn . . . As a matter of fact, Dinah, no one knows what happened. She was never found. She went upstairs with her white cocker spaniel—the dog was faithfully devoted to her—and she was never seen again.

"And the dog?"

"The cocker disappeared with her. He was never seen either. Walt Nurbeck came home, grief-stricken, and offered rewards which were never claimed. No trace of the girl was ever found. It was established that Gloria Canova could never have left by the front door because her agent, Karl Anderson, could see it from where he sat. She didn't leave by the back door because the cook was there and would have seen her. She could have lowered herself out of a window with rope and sheets, along with the dog, and made an exit into eternity that way, but—well, where did she go? What happened to her?"

"There's murder in it," I said.

"Baloney," said the Old Man. "Always a nose for sudden death. Keep this one sane. I'll resume. Now during the time that Walt Nurbeck was on his way home from Africa, the maid and cook kept up housekeeping there in the house, waiting for him. They telephoned the police one night after the disappearance, terrified. When the cops got there, the maid was a case.

"She'd seen a ghost—the ghost of the cocker spaniel. She'd heard deathly wails—the wails of her missing mistress. And a strange Satanic organ had played a ghastly tune during the whole thing. Needless to say, the cook and maid both left the premises. The police found nothing. And Walt Nurbeck arrived home to an empty house, already steeped in tragedy, and quickly acquiring a nasty reputation."

"The newspapers had a field day with that case," I said. "It comes back like a picture now. They called the place the Old Dark House and they referred to it thereafter as New York's number one haunt. Gloria Canova's spook was supposed to walk the place, moaning loudly, the white ghostly cocker at her side, and sometime unseen hands would touch an unseen organ and the results would be terrific. Cops on the beat heard the organ. I remember that. They said it was terrible!"

"The organ," remarked the Old Man sagely, "was another red herring. Nobody could figure it out. Of course, the guy who owned the house before Walt Nurbeck was an organist and also psychotic. He killed himself with an old-fashioned straight razor one night. So, naturally, the story went around that he came back to play in spectral form."

It was getting late. Outside the night had come down and you couldn't see the Hudson River anymore, out the window. You couldn't see much of anything, as a matter of fact, since a greasy fog had seeped in over a greasy sea, and all the lights of Manhattan were clotted with the white cotton mist. They stood out like dim fuzzy balls up off the sidewalk.

"Well," I said presently, "and what has all this talk about ghosts to do with the nocturnal assignment?"

The Old Man stared at the calendar on the wall and pecked at a front tooth with his right forefinger, frowning as he thought. "Walt Nurbeck is a close friend of mine," he said. "That's why I'm doing this. He doesn't believe in ghosts either."

"So what?" Dinah asked.

"He telephoned me this afternoon," said the Old Man. "I told you: he wants to stay in town for the winter. So he has opened up the Old Dark House on East Seventy-second Street. It hasn't been open since he closed it up after Gloria Canova disappeared, eight years ago. He hired some help—a male cook and a valet. He had the gas and water and light turned on yesterday morning. He spent his first night there last night."

I began to feel goose pimples forming down my spine as if I had an intuition of what the Old Man was going to say. I choked and then gulped: "Yeah?"

"He hasn't got a cook nor a valet this evening. They hauled out of the Old Dark House bright and early this a. m."

"Why? Ghosts?" Dinah asked breathlessly.

"Ghosts!" said the Old Man firmly. "And the startling fact is that Walt saw one himself. He saw the cocker spaniel last night, shortly after midnight. He'd been in the living room. He turned off the lights as he left the room, and as he started for the stairs in the hallway, he saw the cocker run down from the upper floor, pause on the first landing, then scoot up to the second floor again. The dog was there all right, but he could see right through the beast, as though it were running around in a coat of ectoplasm.

"He was quite shaken, put it down to imagination, and went to bed. At intervals throughout the night, he heard the organ—no practiced hand playing it—

just a lot of minor chords, jumbled, horrible, filling the whole house and yet, not being there at all."

I took a deep breath. "And I, foul fiend," I protested, "am supposed to lay the banshee of the Old Dark House all by my lonesome tonight?"

"Not exactly," the Old Man replied. "Walt didn't believe his ears nor his eyes. He wanted me to send up one of my best men to cover the place. And he wanted a camera along for a quick picture of the cocker's spook. You're the man."

"Thanks," I said dryly. I glanced at Dinah. "Want to come along, Angel Eyes? Your sex appeal might help."

Dinah set her chin out firmly. "I don't believe in ghosts," she said, her voice a trifle tremulous. "I think it's all a fake. I think you're trying to rib Daffy on this one. And just to prove it I *will* go along."

"So will I," boomed a big new voice.

We all wheeled, startled, and who should we find standing there but Captain Bill "Poppa" Hanley of the New York Homicide Bureau.

"Poppa!" I said, sighing in relief. "You, too? What a pleasure."

"The pleasure's all mine," Poppa Hanley said, smiling slightly as he tilted his red homely face toward us. "Couldn't help overhearing you. If you ask me, there's something that isn't quite so phony about the whole business. Why should the same things happen after eight years? There's something in that house. And I'd like to find what it is. After all, wouldn't it be nice to get a lead on what happened to Gloria Canova eight years ago? I'd like to break that case, by thunder!"

"May you, may you!" I said. "But have you got a rod?"

"You'll probably need it." said the Old Man, smiling as though he were enjoying a huge joke. "Look at the calendar!"

We all had a look. And we suddenly learned that this particular Friday fell on a thirteenth and that it was a night of the full moon, despite the fog. I felt lower than a caterpillar's tummy.

"Huh!" Poppa Hanley grunted noisily.

No more was said. I picked up the camera, took Dinah's arm, and Hanley followed us out.

It was a nasty night. The fog had closed down so that you couldn't see the lights of buildings a short block away. It was that thick drizzling type of fog which seems to pick up the soft coal dust over the city and lay it down on everything—windshields, faces, clothes—until you felt like a second-hand soda straw.

We rode uptown in a cab to East 45th Street and we had din-

ner at the Divan Parisienne. It was a good dinner, but somehow, it didn't give us a lift.

Dinah was very nervous. She kept chewing celery stalks and staring at me. I didn't like the way she stared at me. You'd have thought I was a candidate for lilies or something.

Ghosts, however, did not affect Poppa Hanley's appetite in the least. He put it all away and looked for more.

As for myself, the story which the Old Man told seemed to reach me more than I liked. It was a depressing sort of thing. If some departed soul had staged a spectral spree in the Old Dark House, I'd have known it was a phony and it would have been fun to lay the banshee. But the fact that the spook was the shade of a faithful cocker spaniel—that kind of got me. Just like it had got Dinah and the Old Man.

There was something rather sad in the ghost of a dog.

When we finally left the Divan Parisienne and went uptown even further, to East 72nd Street, my spirits were lower than the fog. I had a feeling I wasn't going to like the entire business. The night was worse; rain had started to needle down in a fine spray. When we reached the place it was nearly eight-thirty p. m.

We got out. I paid off the cab driver and made a mental note, duplicating the sum for the swindle sheet.

We gave the Old Dark House a once-over lightly.

It was a fine mansion for spooks. Surviving as a relic of the ancient regime of New York, it stood in East 72nd Street like an anachronism in a shining city. It was medieval, compared with the two ultra-modern apartment houses which flanked each side of it. It was a dreary gray-stone house, with gingerbread effects all up the front of it, including a bizarre Byzantine fencing around the flat surface of the roof.

There were three floors. Only the lower floor was lighted. The amber glow behind the drawn shades of the windows downstairs made the windows resemble two huge eyes, softly veiled by the rain and the fog of the night.

We went up the four steps to the front door and we rang the bell.

The man who answered was Walter Nurbeck himself. I recognized him from motion pictures of his various safaris in Africa. I had never met him before in my life. He was older than his pictures had indicated. There were weather lines in his face and a touch of maturity at his temples, a fine pepper-and-salt sprinkling of gray hair.

He looked at us, quietly surprised, and then said: "I beg

your pardon. I hadn't expected—"

"I'm from the *Chronicle*," I said. "The Old Man sent me. I'm Daffy Dill. The job is taking pictures of a ghost while an organ plays in C minor."

"Yes," Nurbeck nodded. "But—"

"This is Miss Mason," I said. "She's to write a story on what she sees in case I'm busy with the camera. And this is Captain Hanley of the Homicide Bureau. He figures the ghost may have a lot to do with the disappearance of Gloria Canova eight years ago, and he'd like a chance to prove it."

"By all means!" Nurbeck exclaimed, his voice quivering. "Do come in, gentlemen and Miss Mason. Sorry to have been impolite, but my nerves aren't at their best tonight. You'll just have to drop your coats here in the hall. No servants around. They departed after last night, poor souls, and I can't blame them."

There was a Chinese teak chest in the hall by the door and we laid our hats and coats on it before we had a look around.

"Before we go into the living room," Nurbeck said, "I'd like you to glance up at the staircase. We'll come out here later on. The dog came down from the top landing there to the intermediate landing, stood still momentarily, then turned and ran to disappear into the wall behind its back."

I looked hard. It was a gloomy house at best. The most modern furniture wouldn't have changed it. The walls were all of paneled oak, stained very dark like mahogany. The staircase—very narrow—went up to a small landing on the left side of the hall. Here, at the landing, it made a ninety-degree right turn and went up to the second floor of the house. All around the left side of the staircase as it descended, the paneled oak motif held.

"Hmmmm!" said Poppa Hanley with profundity.

"Let's go inside," Dinah suggested, because her knees were knocking together with the speed of a rolling drum and she had to sit down.

Nurbeck led us into the living room. It looked cheerful, which was a nice change. He had a fire going in the big stone fireplace and the furniture looked comfortable, and there was a flagon of port wine which Nurbeck immediately served to us. We all sat around the fire and we drank the wine slowly and didn't say much, and I kept the camera close to me, set at hyperfocal distance and loaded with a flash bulb and ready to go.

Then I began to feel it.

I'd felt it twice before. Once when I visited the little green room at Sing Sing where the electric chair sits in the room and

rows of benches stretch out before it for witnesses. The time I saw it the room was empty, except for my guide and myself. But I felt death there, as distinctly as if a man had been dying while I watched. You couldn't get away from its actuality. It was *there* in that little green room.

Another time I felt it was in an operating room when I was watching a very simple appendectomy. There was no reason on earth why the operation should not have been successful and the patient should have lived, regardless. But I felt death that time too—close, sure—its presence making the small of my back prickle like a desert cactus and get cold and bloodless. The patient died on the table.

. . . It was here, too, in this house, suddenly. The cactus flourished once more down my spine and breathing came hard and my veins felt cold despite the roaring fire, and death visited the premises.

The vigil for a ghost went on for three hours while we chatted idly, or, for long periods, said nothing at all. At eleven-thirty the room was entirely silenced, and we were all staring morosely at the dying flames in the fireplace. Nurbeck's head had fallen to his chest and his eyes shone glassily in the fire's reflection, as he stared intently at the embers. Dinah watched the flames too, her chin on her hands, her face very white. Poppa Hanley leaned back in his chair as he chewed stolidly on an unlighted stogie, for Poppa liked to chew, but never smoked.

"What is it?" Dinah asked suddenly, sitting up straight and rubbing her elbows briskly.

"What's that?" I snapped, nerves on edge.

"I—I heard something," Dinah quavered.

"Yes," said Nurbeck, his face very pallid, even in the red touch of the fire flare. "You *did* hear something!"

"I didn't hear anything," affirmed Poppa Hanley. "Not a doggone thing."

I said: "Nor I."

"It's time," Nurbeck said, disregarding us completely. "A little earlier tonight than last night, but it's started."

He rose and began putting out the lights of the living room. Soon we were completely in the dark, seeing each other only by the glow of the moribund hearth embers.

"What's to happen?" I asked.

"Mr. Dill," Nurbeck said, his voice high and thin and unsure, "above all else, you must get a picture tonight. I've had doubts about my own mind after what took place last night. Tonight I want a picture. I must have a picture and the testimony of reliable witnesses. You won't fail me?"

"I'll get the picture," I said, "if there's one to get. But for Pete's sake, will you give me an *in* on what's to come off?"

He held up his finger in a solemnly prophetic manner. *"Listen!"*

I heard it and froze. Dinah heard it and gasped. Poppa heard it, slowly removed the cigar from his mouth and drawled: "Well, blow me down, it's on the level."

At first, it was only the hoarse whisper of rushing wind, filling the house in one tremulous gust, emanating from nowhere yet reaching everywhere. A vibrant reedy concussion which could only be felt inside your mind. Then—a rush of sound which broke the trembling silence like a splitting crack of thunder. The sound of a pipe organ welling up to a ghastly crescendo throughout the house, within the walls of the house, everywhere.

C minor—then a horrible crashing discord! B flat—and another rending discord! C minor—and a series of tripping de, *de,* dum, *dum,* do, *do,* DUM! like spectral rivulets of mistaken melody falling from the mad fingers of a madder madman as his hands tripped along a keyboard without rhyme or reason.

Without warning all sounds ceased. It was as though a magician's hand had passed over the Old Dark House and had left it without life, without pulse, without breath. We were all standing on our feet at that point, wild-eyed, gasping, pale. My ticker was hitting against my ribs until I thought it would crack one of them.

"It—it seemed to come from the hall outside," Dinah faltered.

"It comes from everywhere," Walter Nurbeck said soberly. "I've tried to trace it down but can't. It's in the walls themselves and it's—it's terrifying—"

"Judas!" Poppa Hanley grunted, holding up his hand.

Again sound. This time, a single wavering soprano note, penetrating, sharp, holding onto its pitch for ten eternal seconds before it broke into a series of mashed notes all struck at the same time and ending in a crash of discordant noise which shook us.

"Let's see the hall," Hanley snapped.

"Yes," said Nurbeck. "But go quietly. It's time. And Mr. Dill—your camera, please."

We moved into the hall. The reflection of the embers did not reach out there. The hall was solidly black now. We could not see the staircase at all. We moved in the intangible pitch by feeling our way against each other.

"Wait and watch," Walter Nurbeck whispered hollowly.

"And listen," Dinah added hoarsely. "There goes little Joe on the organ again."

She was right. The organ

crashed out for the third time, and this rendition was almost entirely played on the bass keys of the ectoplasmic instrument, cannonades of rumbling sounds whose vibrations — mute but strong—played themselves upon our bodies as we stood, bathed in the blackness.

It was Poppa Hanley who spoke next.

We had waited for the canine ghost for something over ten minutes. The vigil had been something to go through, sitting in a lonely, gloomy hallway, waiting for a spectre others had seen, knowing it would come, disbelieving in its reality, yet believing in its presence and all the time, at frequent, unexpected intervals, the horrific crash of the unseen organ while hands crashed across an unseen keyboard.

For the first time in my life, I didn't feel very funny. And then Poppa Hanley said slowly and strangely quiet: "There's death in this house. I can feel it as though I could see it."

"I know," I whispered, holding the camera up in front of me, waiting for a picture of a ghost.

"I'll find it," Hanley said. "It's here somewhere and I'll find it." And none of us knew what he meant just then.

None of us paid any attention to what he said at that particular moment, in fact. For Dinah interrupted him with a knife-like hiss, a gasp caught as it was born: "On the stair! Look—"

It came from the top landing lightly, that ghost, skipping down sure-footed and nimble and low to the ground, a white cocker spaniel by a slight stretch of the imagination. You could see through it—the stairs were suddenly visible behind it, and the hall seemed to glow a little bit in reflecting the whiteness of the beast.

I became aware that the hair on the back of my neck was standing out like quills on a porcupine's spine, and I could hardly breathe. I was gripping the camera so damned hard that my knuckles were hurting.

The white shadow ran down the stairs to the intermediate landing and paused there. It seemed to turn and bark at the oaked panel behind the landing. It couldn't be described. It was just there.

A nucleus of lights and shadow which made a cocker, made dark spots in the shadow where there might have been eyes and a mouth and a nose. It had a flowing quality like liquid.

I snapped the plunger on the camera.

There was a blinding flash of light which illumined the entire place with startling clarity for one-fiftieth of a second, and I had a picture.

When the flash had faded and we could focus once more—a

tough job after a photoflash—the ghost was gone, vanished completely.

"Lights!" Poppa Hanley roared.

"But it'll return," Nurbeck said.

"The hell with that," said Hanley. "I want lights and let's have 'em. That spook kept looking at that panel. Maybe it's a hunch. Gimme lights!"

Nurbeck gave him lights. The moment they were on, Hanley dashed up the stairs to the intermediate landing and began to pound the oak panel there—the one the dog had looked at. It sounded solid enough but it was oak and you couldn't tell.

"Come on up here," Hanley said. "Everybody feel around and see if anything opens here. Never mind! *I've got it.* Just a minute now—"

We were all up on the landing in a flash. The panel had shot inward and Poppa Hanley had nearly catapulted in after it. He'd been leaning against it when he found the wood piece—a carved leaf in the border of the panel—which, when depressed, unlocked the panel. A concealed spring pulled it in. You had a good chance of diving in head first. Hanley durn near did.

"Take it easy," Hanley said from where he stood beyond the panel. "There's a stone stairway here. It leads down to a room. And there's your organ down there. An electric light is on. There—" He paused.

"Let me in," I said.

"You come, Daffy," said Hanley. "Dinah, stay out of this. There's something down here you won't want to see. Nor you, Mr. Nurbeck. Stay up here and we'll have a look and be right up."

"You couldn't get me down there," Dinah said, "for a permanent wave with a million bucks thrown in."

"I'll—I'll stay," Nurbeck faltered. He looked thin and gaunt and piqued suddenly. He must have guessed what we would find.

We went down the stairs. There were fifteen of them and they led to a subcellar which had been cut out of the ground beneath the front of the house. The concrete room wasn't large. It couldn't have been more than six by six.

But there was a single bulb on and it showed four things in that six-by-six tomb. It showed an organ. It showed two bodies. It showed rats . . .

I took a couple of pictures for the paper while Poppa Hanley had a closer look. I finished when he did. "Do you get the lay of this thing?" he asked.

"You tell me," I said. "I'm still shaky."

"That's Gloria Canova," said Hanley. "And that's the cocker

dog you've heard so much about."

She was in a silver fox-collared coat, wrapped tightly around what was left of her body. The dampness of the cellar hadn't been kind. There was only a skeleton left, along with a fetid, heavy smell. I could see the fracture in front of the skull, and the right leg, snapped in two. She was lying face down on the concrete floor close to the organ and she had one hand extended up to the organ bench. The dog lay close beside her, skeletal in form, on his right side.

"When she left to go upstairs that night," Hanley said, "she must've leaned against that panel and opened it when she reached the middle landing. She wasn't prepared for it and she fell straight through and down these stairs. You can see: she broke her leg and cracked her skull. But that didn't kill her."

"No?"

"No," said Hanley. "She must have regained consciousness at one time with just enough strength to turn the electric switch on the organ and push down some of the keys. Maybe she hoped some one would hear it and come looking for her. That switch has been left on for eight years from the night she died."

"The motor for pumping couldn't have lasted for eight years of constant turning over."

"I don't know about that," said Hanley. "But the juice was all turned off when Nurbeck closed the house. So the organ motor hasn't been running in eight years. It is now. It started running when Nurbeck had the electricity turned on again and opened up the house. Since then, at night, the rats come out and run across the keyboard and that's why the damned spine-chilling sounds were heard."

"What about the dog?"

"Died of starvation, I figure," said Hanley. "There he is. He stuck to the last."

"I mean the ghost!" I said.

"Let's go downtown to headquarters and develop that plate," said Poppa, "and I'll explain about the ghost."

We went upstairs and told Dinah and Walter Nurbeck what had happened. It broke Nurbeck all up. We didn't want to leave him alone, so we took him along to headquarters.

Poppa Hanley had one of his police photographers develop my plate and while he was doing it, I telephoned the Old Man at the *Chronicle* office and spilled the whole yarn to him. It was one I wasn't pleased to call in. It was one which did not elate the Old Man. Somehow the picture of those bodies in that cellar was pathetic.

When the police photographer had the plates ready, he printed them and gave us a soaking wet

job to look over. The shots I'd taken in the sub-cellar were all perfect. But it was the one of the ghost in the hall that knocked me on an ear.

There were the stairs, all in perfect focus. The walls with all their detail. The paneling. The bannisters. The rug. But on the middle landing where the cocker had been when I snapped the picture there was—*nothing!*

"Uh-huh," said Hanley.

"What do you mean 'uh-huh'?" I demanded. "You saw the thing. We all saw the thing. I caught it with the flash. And there's nothing here!"

Hanley smiled. "What'd you expect? A ghost isn't anything to begin with. This was just a regular ghost. That is to say—nothing. And that is what you took a picture of."

"But what did we see then?"

"We saw light," said Hanley. "Light that could be anything we wanted it to be. In this instance, I will admit, it was a dead ringer for a white cocker. I don't know but what you could call it a ghost at that. It led us to the right panel."

"But what caused it?"

"Three things," said Hanley. "Defective glass, an automobile, and a mirror. Neat, eh? But while you people watched the ghost, I watched to see what made it. The car that came by had high lights on. Those high lights caught a whorl in the living room window on the right side, and focused a blob of light into the hall mirror which, in turn, shot the light up the stairs. As the car moved past the light came down the stairs and when it had reached a ninety-degree angle with the window, the ghost vanished.

"However, your photoflash was a bright light. It deleted the lesser light which made the ghost and thus you had no picture at all of the ghost. Light versus light. The flash won. If you could have made a time exposure, you'd have had a picture. You still can make a shot if you want. I'll drive the prowl car up and park it just right for the ghost to be on the landing. Then you can make a time—"

"Skip it," I said.

"Sure," said Poppa Hanley quietly. "I know how you feel, Daffy. Lights or no lights, that cocker was the only ghost I ever saw in whom I'd like to believe. After all, it was as though he were trying to break through and let us know about his mistress. It was as though—having been unsuccessful in keeping her alive—he was doing his best to see her buried. And it worked."

Hanley turned to Walter Nurbeck. "I'm sending the squad up along with the medical examiner, Mr. Nurbeck. The house'll be cleared shortly and you can go home."

"No," Nurbeck said. "No. I'll

never live in the place again. It murdered her. I've had an offer. I'm selling it to be razed. The man who owned it before me was mad, they said. Killed himself. Some sort of wealthy musician who felt he was being persecuted. Of course he had the room built where he could play the organ in solitude. But who would have thought—"

Hanley's office was very still and very sad.

"Let's go home," Dinah said, sniffling slightly.

And we went . . .

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1. The names and addresses of the publisher, editor, managing editor, and business managers are:

Publishers, King-Size Pubs., 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y.
Editor, Leo Margulies, 16 East 84th Street, New York 28, N. Y.
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2. The owner is: (If owned by a corporation, its name and address must be stated and also immediately thereunder the names and addresses of stockholders owning or holding 1 percent or more of total amount of stock. If not owned by a corporation, the names and addresses of the individual owners must be given. If owned by a partnership or other unincorporated firm, its name and address, as well as that of each individual member, must be given.)

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H. L. HERBERT, President.

(Seal)

Sworn to and subscribed before me this 14th day of September, 1955.

WALTER S. COOPER, Notary Public.

State of New York, Qualified in New York County, No. 31-5811250, Cert. filed in N. Y. Co. Clks. & Term Expires March 30, 1956.

keep it cool

by . . . Julius Long

The darkest of crimes have often been thrown out of joint by a daring a bit on the macabre side. But for deep-freeze shudders—

THE ONLY reason I took Audrey to the sale at Findlay was that I needed another driver in case I didn't sell the '53 Olds and bought another car or in case I sold the Olds and bought two cars. I couldn't afford to hire a driver, and it was Audrey's day off. I certainly couldn't afford to buy more than one car unless I sold the Olds. As Big Mike Fonseca, who called himself the Used Car King of Greenville, always said, you've got to crawl before you can walk.

Making a down payment on the house even with a GI loan and stocking it with furniture had reduced my business capital. Audrey and I weren't to be married for a month, but I was already living in the house as there was no use paying room rent. There was a refrigerator with a deep freeze compartment, and I saved money getting my own meals. I tried to avoid stocking high-priced cars, and even the 53 Olds was a little too much for me, so I was wholesaling it at the Findlay auction.

We were just entering Findlay

It wouldn't be quite accurate to call this a wish-upon-a-star yarn, because Julius Long is an old hand at concocting out of a whole cloth the most grimly realistic of detective mystery thrillers and everyone knows that such yarns have little in common with the daydreams of happy infants. But there's certainly a kind of magical fulfillment in a crime turnabout as amazing as this.

when Big Mike drove by me in his Caddie convertible.

"Who's the new girl?" Audrey asked.

I shrugged. I didn't try to keep tabs on Big Mike's new girls. But I had noticed all the blonde hair on this one and had got a look at the kind of face a show girl wears. Big Mike was pushing sixty, but he liked them young and flashy.

I got a better look at the girl when we arrived at the auction lot. Big Mike was showing her off to everyone and introducing her around as if she were private property. She was a flashy job, all right, streamlined and built for use in a convertible. I had left Audrey parked in the Olds, and Big Moke spotted me and brought over the blonde.

"This is one of my younger competitors in town," he said. "Paul Smith. He's served his country in Korea and trying to get started in the roughest business in the world. Paul, meet Tanya."

Tanya looked me over, but only briefly, and hardly acknowledged the introduction. My feelings weren't hurt much. She was built, all right, and she had a pretty face, but I wouldn't have traded Audrey for a dozen cream puff jobs like that.

I registered the Olds, and told the clerk what I had to have for it. Then I began to look around at the other cars. I needed a 51 Buick four-door and a 52 Mercury coupe. I found both, and as luck would have it, they both belonged to Sam Foster, from Lebanon, a good guy I'd met right after I'd got in the used car business. Sam even had another 52 Mercury coupe, same color, blue. I looked them both over and decided on the one the auction clerk had already numbered No. 139.

What decided me was when I lifted up the hood and looked inside. I let the hood down quick as Sam came over.

"Sam, I want you to do me a favor. I brought Audrey along today, and she wants to get back early. If I wait till this Merc comes up, it'll run me late. That other Merc's numbered fourteen. Why not switch numbers on the cars. This is the one I want."

Sam shrugged. "Okay, if the clerk gives permission. Only I don't know why you got a preference. Both Mercs are repossession jobs. Both were abandoned by their owners, and I got them from a finance company that picked them up where they'd been left."

"Well, I kinda like this one. And I've got another favor. I just got here, so my Fifty-three Olds will get a high number. I wonder if you'll swap me a lower number and take the one the clerk gives me for the Olds."

"Sure. Let's see the clerk now."

Sam was so nice about it I felt ashamed of myself for what I was doing to him. We walked over to where Johnny Ryan, the clerk, sat at a card table with ledgers and card index files. We told Johnny what we wanted, and he said okay.

Of course he would have to report the number switches to the auctioneer so there'd be no beef if a dealer had examined the cars and later beefed that he'd been crossed up by the switch. The cars were sold by number, and though the auctioneer would announce the make, model, year and color, most dealers just jotted down the numbers of the cars they were interested in.

Johnny Ryan made the changes on his records and told us to go ahead and change the numbers. Just when I was telling myself he was one of the nicest guys in the world he had to let me have it.

"You want me to give a number to your two-headed baby, too?"

Something about the look on my face made him stop laughing. Sam Foster had started a grin, but it froze, too. It's not that I'm a guy who can't take a joke, but the kidding about the two-headed baby was getting pretty old.

I went on to the Olds, where Audrey had parked it, and found Tanya standing there beside the car, talking to her. Audrey looked a little plain beside Tanya, but that was the way I liked it. I got the number off the Olds. I'd started away with the number, when Tanya said:

"You must show me your two-headed baby sometime, Mr. Smith. Mike says it's simply marvelous."

I turned and glared. Audrey gave me a warning look, and I forced a smile.

"Sure. Any time."

I was burned up, as I walked over to Sam Foster's cars to get a low number for the Olds. It seemed I'd never live down the two-headed baby I'd taken in trade for a 47 Dodge.

A carnival man had driven up in a 42 Pontiac that needed a whole new engine and dickered for the Dodge. He was short on cash, and we were about fifty bucks apart. I should have known better than to go for the proposition he came up with.

"Listen, I hate to part with part of my show, but I just got to have new wheels to get to Miamisburg. Tell you what I'll do. I'll let you have my two-headed baby for fifty bucks. It's worth a hundred in the catalogue. Look."

I don't know why the guy wasted his time in the carnival with freak exhibits. He should have been a hypnotist. He got out an old catalogue with pictures and prices of all kinds of freaks. They were made of wax, and you put them in a glass tank filled with water that was supposed to

be alcohol, and they looked like the real thing. The two-headed baby was there and listed at a hundred dollars.

"Mine's like new," said the carnival man. "See for yourself."

I think I jumped a foot when he suddenly opened the lid of his trunk. The two-headed baby was there, and a ghastly thing it was. But before the guy got through talking I'd agreed to allow him fifty bucks on it. He promised to redeem it inside of a month.

"Just hold it for me, will you?" he pleaded. "And take good care of it, please! It's made of wax and it's got to be kept cool so it won't melt. Be sure to keep it where it's cool!"

I agreed. That had been a year ago, and it was the last I had ever seen of the carnival man. It was my bad luck that Charlie Shavers, salesman for Big Mike, dropped into my little office before I got the two-headed baby out of sight. Charlie wangled the story out of me, and from then on I'd been a marked man. I couldn't go anywhere without someone riding me about that two-headed baby. I knew I'd never live it down.

I gave Sam Foster the number from my Olds and took a low number from one of his other cars back to it. Audrey was alone this time.

"Well, where's your friend?"

"She's with Big Mike. You know, Paul, I think there's something special about that girl. She's here for some very special reason. She's got something on her mind, and it's very important to her."

"Sure she's got something important on her mind. Big Mike."

I put the new number on the Olds. Twenty minutes later the auction started. When Sam Foster's Buick, No. 9, was put up, I wondered if he would have someone by-bid against me, because he knew I wanted it. But he didn't, and I got the car at a decent price.

I'd got a No. 12 sign for the Olds because I wanted to know whether I'd have enough cash to buy the Mercury. For moments I was afraid the Olds wasn't going to go for what I had asked, but finally Big Mike himself bought it. I saw him standing there making a terrific impression on Tanya. And she was making a terrific impression on the other dealers.

All that was needed to make a perfect day was to have the Mercury drop to me right. And it did. Sam Foster was sure a real pal, not trying to gouge me with by-bidding. Of course he knew I couldn't afford to go higher than the car was worth anyway.

I settled up with the clerk, and he growled a little.

"Bud called the change in numbers on the Olds, but not on that Merc." he said. "Thank heaven you knew about it. I'll have to give him the high sign when he moves the other Merc."

I hadn't noticed the slip-up.

Bud Schuler was the auctioneer. He couldn't be expected to remember everything.

I told Audrey to drive the Merc, and I drove the Buick. Halfway home we stopped at Fairborn for lunch.

"How does the Merc drive?" I asked Audrey.

"Swell."

"It should. It has a fifty-five engine under the hood. It's a miracle Sam Foster didn't notice that."

Audrey arched her brows. "Was that honest, not telling him about it?"

I shrugged. "Since that two-headed baby deal I'm giving no quarter to any dealer in the world. Getting this Merc with the fifty-five engine is just a little of the revenge I need."

Audrey eyed me in a strange way, as if she weren't quite sure about me any more. I stared right back at her without batting an eye. I was going to run my business the way I pleased, and when we got married she could run her house the way she pleased.

We got out of the restaurant and on the road in time for me to pick up the twelve-forty-five news broadcast. The Buick had a good radio. There was the usual stuff about balancing the budget and then the state news, which led off with a story about Donnie Banion. Donnie was the bank robber who had knocked off the Lebanon National Bank a couple of months ago and got away with fifty thousand dollars in low denomination bills. He was Number One on the FBI wanted list, and now they had found him. They hadn't found the fifty thousand dollars, though, and Donnie would never tell them where it was, for he was dead. The bank and a bankers' association had offered a ten thousand-dollar reward for the recovery of the loot.

A policeman's slug, fired wildly when Donnie had been making his getaway, had finally accounted for his life after two months. The proprietor of a tourist court had found Donnie alone in a unit that morning. The tourist court was one Audrey and I must have passed, for it was only a couple miles from Findlay on the same road we had taken.

I wondered if Audrey had her radio on and had picked up the news. She usually listened to the same program. I could see her following me in the Buick's rear view mirror.

We got to Greenville around three-thirty in the afternoon. It was Audrey's day off, and I told her to take the Merc and meet me at the lot around five-thirty for dinner.

I drove the Buick into the lot and opened up the office, for I was my only sales force. I called up the guy who I thought would take the Buick and told him I'd

come around and pick him up. He said he got off at five and would come to the lot.

He showed, sure enough, and so far it was my lucky day, for I got just what I had counted on out of that Buick. The deal was closed when Audrey came back in the Merc. I saw something was wrong from the look on her face. I locked up and went over to her.

"What's up?"

Her voice didn't sound like her own. "Get in and come with me."

I got in beside her, and she headed toward my house—our house. I tried to get out of her what she was so excited and worried about, but she wouldn't say a word.

She led me into the house and into the living room. She walked to the radio-phonograph, which we'd decided to buy instead of the TV set. There was a pretty big record compartment, but I noticed all the records that had been in it were out and stacked on top of the cabinet. Audrey opened the door of the record compartment, and I must have let my mouth fall wide open.

I had never seen so many bills.

"Fifty thousand dollars!" said Audrey. "I counted it!"

"For God's sake, where did you get it?"

"Out of the Mercury, behind the fabric lining of the trunk compartment. It was loose, and I tried to fit it back. Then I noticed a stack of those bills."

"Now what were they doing in that Mercury?"

"Listen to me." Her eyes were shining with excitement. "Did you hear the radio broadcast about Donnie Banion being found dead near Findlay this noon?" I nodded. "Well, nobody ever found the fifty thousand dollars he stole from the bank. It was a single-handed job. Donnie always worked alone. That was one of the things about him that everybody knew. And there was something else everybody knew. Though he always used a hot car to pull a job in, he always abandoned it where he'd left a real fast car that he actually owned. Under an assumed name, of course. Do you follow me?"

I sat down in one of the new chairs. I shook my head. "Audrey, I can't keep up with you. So you're the girl I'm going to marry! I never dreamed you followed the crime news."

She frowned with impatience. "Well, I do. And it's a good thing, because we're going to get that ten thousand reward that's out for the return of the money stolen from the Lebanon bank!"

"Well, that would be just fine. But first we're gong to call the cops."

I started for the phone. Then I saw Big Mike.

For a big man he had certainly moved quietly. The girl at his

side had been equally silent. She was Tanya, and she wore a grim look that put premature little lines in her face. She also wore a gun.

Big Mike had a gun, too. It looked as big as Mike himself.

Breath escaped from Audrey in a little woosh as she beheld the pair of visitors.

"Well, come right in and sit down, Mike!" I tried to get the jitters out of my voice and sound like a genial host, but I didn't fool anybody. I wondered why Mike and the girl weren't staring at the money in the record compartment of the radio-phonograph. Then I heard a slight click. I did not turn. I knew what had happened.

Audrey had been standing between the doorway and the compartment, and she had moved backward to close the door. There were still the records on top of the cabinet, but the visitors might not guess why they were there. I took it for granted that they were after the money.

"Where is it?" the girl demanded. "Where you got it?"

"What? What are you talking about?"

Big Mike strode toward me.

"Let's can the nonsense! You know what we're after. What I can't figure out is how you knew that Merc was Donnie Banion's car and got Sam Foster to switch the numbers. You were off the lot before the other Merc went on the block and Bud remembered to mention the switch."

"You're on the wrong track, Mike. All I knew about that car was that it had a fifty-five motor in it."

Mike's disbelief then showed through his puffy features. He was looking much older now than he had that morning at the auction. I could fathom the desperation in his face.

"I ain't going to argue about what you knew. I'll just tell you what I know that you know. You know where that fifty grand is. You're going to hand it over."

"Mike, you must be out of your mind! You've got the most profitable used car lot in the city. If you pull off this steal you'll have to blow the country. How can you afford to give up your business for fifty thousand dollars?"

Mike laughed bitterly. "A lot you know about my business! It takes a lot of money for the kind of life I gotta have! I've double financed my cars and overdue on furnishin' titles for a dozen of 'em! The bank is about ready to lower the boom. The check I gave for that Olds of yours today was pure rubber. I was at the end of my rope when I met Tanya and she made me a proposition.

"She was Donnie Banion's girl friend. She knew he'd stashed the Lebanon bank dough in that Merc. And she knew where the Merc was. Banion was supposed

to meet her in it, but he got plugged and was just able to drag himself out of it. He couldn't take the bank loot—all the dough he had was what was in his pocket. He hid out and was actually tryin' to get to that Merc when he died in that motel. Everything was wide open for Tanya and me —until you had to work a fast shuffle with them numbers. Now hand over the dough!"

I shot a glance at Audrey. She was white, but game. She would never tell Mike where the money was, so it was up to me.

"Okay, Mike, you win. The money's in the deep freeze compartment of the refrigerator in the kitchen."

A look of satisfaction came over Mike's face.

"You look and see if he's on the level," he told Tanya. Then he added quickly: "Wait. Give me that gun. I'm takin' no chances on a double-cross."

Tanya hesitated, then handed him her gun. He took it in his left hand.

"Be careful," she warned. "I don't like the looks of that guy. He looks like a smarty to me."

She stepped from the living room. There was a small dining room between it and the kitchen. I could hear the refrigerator door open, then I heard Tanya's shrill, piercing scream.

I had expected the scream, and Big Mike hadn't. I jumped him at the first sound, when he started and turned involuntarily toward the door through which Tanya had passed. I knocked the gun out of his right hand at the first blow. I wasn't bothered about the gun in his left hand, for he did not have his finger through the trigger guard.

He was seventy-five pounds heavier than I, but he was a lot older and a lot softer. I let him have a couple in the bread-basket, brought an uppercut from the floor, and that was that, in so far as Big Mike was concerned. He was out cold as he sagged to the floor. Then I rushed toward the kitchen to take care of Tanya and bring peace to our home.

Audrey had already thought of that. The girls were in a tangle on the linoleum, sheer-clad legs kicking wildly as they clawed each other.

I figured Audrey could handle Tanya, and I was worried about Big Mike reviving. I went back and phoned the police. Then I went back to the kitchen to see the last round of the Audrey-Tanya go. I had picked a winner, all right.

Audrey was just putting the finishing touches on Tanya, as I got back. She banged Tanya's head against the floor and knocked her cold. Then she got up, looked at where I was looking and ran out of the room. She came back quickly with a blanket. She threw it over Tanya. I was still looking as she did so. She

had just about stripped Tanya in that brawl.

"You—" Tanya never finished her accusation.

The cops came up in the town's only cruiser, its siren yowling full blast.

When the cops had left with our story and the money, Audrey and I had a bottle of beer in the kitchen.

"I still don't understand," she said, "how Sam Foster turned up at the auction with Donnie Banion's car."

"That's easy. Banion had bought it under a phony name. When he had to abandon it, the finance company discovered it, repossessed it and sold it to Sam without ever realizing it was Banion's get-away car."

"Well, Sam will never believe you weren't wise, any more than Big Mike wouldn't. Now tell me just one thing more. What made Tanya scream when she found the deep freeze compartment was empty?"

"It wasn't empty, honey. Come here and look."

She got up as I opened the refrigerator door. Then I pulled down the inside door to the deep freeze compartment. I caught Audrey as she passed out, after a scream even louder than Tanya's.

That carnival man couldn't say I had let him down. He had asked me to keep his two-headed baby cool, and I had done it. I had stored it in the deep freeze.

No, sir—he couldn't complain.

There's an excitingly packaged present from the Flying Saucer folk in THE SAINT'S *companion magazine,* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, *January issue now on sale. So exciting indeed is it that we urge you to hasten to your nearest newsdealer and unwrap without delay William Tenn's* WEDNESDAY'S CHILD, *which has about everything you'd expect to find in a top-echelon mystery thriller, plus, the kind of entertainment which has made science fantasy such a noteworthy branch of modern imaginative fiction. And right beside it there's a tale of dark misdeeds on the frontiers of tomorrow—Philip Dick's astounding* MINORITY REPORT—*which wraps crime up so ingeniously that it just can't happen, and a shining gift from Lester del Rey called* KEEPERS OF THE HOUSE—*and many others.*

dead man's millions

by . . . Norman Daniels

A dead man's vengeance may evoke the scorn of hard-headed realists. But murder has a long right arm.

IF HE had been a strapping big man in body, and a braggart, it might have been reasonable to assume that Harry Moore was speaking in character. He was, however, slim—and he stood barely five feet four in elevator shoes. He had sparse straw-colored hair, and his eyes were gray, watery and weak. He wore glasses constantly and had a tendency to peer owlishly through them. Women frightened him, though he had married one of the most charming in town.

Harry Moore was, therefore, unimpressive and unnoteworthy, except in two particulars. He had brains—and he had money.

When Harry gave his dinner party, everybody promptly found a dozen reasons why he should have done so. All of them were wrong, but then no man could have remotely guessed his motive. He'd never given a party before—so naturally we all showed up. It would have taken demons to keep me away. I was Harry's best friend—or oldest, at any rate.

There is a structural permanence in every carefully planned act of violence which cannot readily be destroyed, even when the unhappy victim has passed beyond memory and desire and the lengthening shadow of human retribution. Into this mystery yarn has gone an amazing awareness of that structure, along with high-voltage suspense and a subtle, lightning-swift irony. Seldom has Norman Daniels come up with a crime entertainment more chillingly ingenious.

I'd known him when he had a little one-room lab in back of his father's house. He'd done tough, organic quantitative analysis when he was fourteen and by the time he was twenty, he'd invented half a dozen items that paid him handsome royalties. He was now fifty-eight and still inventing things and it took a whole firm of accountants to keep check on the royalties.

He was a Fellow in a dozen societies. He modestly carried six or seven degrees after his name —some honorary, but most earned the hard way. If he voiced any technical opinions at a general get-together, nobody listened, but when he mounted the rostrum before a select gathering of scientists, there wasn't a sound to be heard except his monotonous voice droning on and on about everything from atom splitting to some new insecticide.

It was quiet, too, when he arose to address us in the dining room of his home.

"You folks are my friends," he said. "I'm not a very sociable man by nature and I don't make friends easily, so it goes without saying that I deeply appreciate your asking me into your homes and to your affairs. That I didn't attend often is no fault of yours. But I am pleased you are here tonight. However, and this may come as a shock, I feel certain that one of you seated at this table—a man I've liked and trusted—has designs on my life."

The statement was typically Harry Mooreish. No evasive beating around the bush, no dramatic qualities to any of his announcements. Just the blunt, plainly stated facts. Not one of his twelve guests said a word, and I'm sure that hardly anyone even breathed.

Harry went on, "A week ago, you will recall, we all attended an affair at Guy's home."

I recalled it very well, because I'm Guy Gregson. It had been just a get-together—nothing special. Men of congenial temperament and interests who liked to talk and do a little business promoting.

Harry let that sink in. "It is important to remember," he said, "that I was the only person in the room who drank wine. Therefore, what happened was positively meant for me. Someone placed a lethal dose of arsenic in my glass of madeira."

No one spoke—and there were no murmurs of sympathy. Only a tenseness, because everyone in the room knew that Harry had more to say—would perhaps even reveal the identity of the man who had tried to kill him.

"I don't know why my death should profit anyone," he said. "At least, all of you stand to make far more money while I am still alive. All of you, in one way or another, are connected with my various business enter-

prises. You each profit handsomely from my patents."

He paused, but not dramatically. He was merely out of breath. I thought someone should speak. I said, "Harry, do you know who tried to kill you?"

"If I did," he said, "I would have gone directly to the police. Fortunately, I did not drink all of my wine. When I returned home, I became ill. I recognized the symptoms and promptly had my stomach pumped out. I performed the analysis of the contents myself and there is no question.

"One of you tried to kill me and therefore I have already taken certain measures. Because you are all my friends, it is only fair to warn you that if I am murdered, my murderer can't possibly escape detection and exposure. I shall solve my own death, even from my grave. That is all I have to say, gentlemen. Now I suggest we forget this unpleasantness and go on with our dinner. There are Havanas for those of you who enjoy them."

That should have ended it. It should have stopped any further attempt on Harry's life because the little man firmly believed every word he said, and believing, would manage to make his threat come true. If he was killed, his murderer would inevitably be discovered.

Harry died four days later. It was not a spectacular death. He simply fell down a steep flight of stairs and broke his neck. Fell or—was pushed. Everyone who had been at the dinner party had no faith in the accident theory.

Martin Evans came to my office the day after the tragedy. Marty had once been one of Harry's favored executives. Harry always picked one highly competent individual to act as a key figure in his various enterprises and receive maximum benefits in the way of work and royalties. But he never kept any one man in that privileged status for very long. Marty had been hoisted out of his plush rating, and set to shift for himself. He hadn't liked it at the time and he had expressed his resentment in vigorous and no uncertain terms, all of which he now remembered too well and with obvious concern.

"What do you think, Guy?" he asked me. "You were Harry's business manager and as close as anyone could get to him. Do you believe he's smart enough—scientific enough, if you like—to come back from the grave and solve his own murder?"

"Who told you it was murder?" I asked him bluntly.

"Well, nobody," he replied. "But he told us he knew he was going to be murdered, and a fatal 'accident' on a flight of stairs in the dead of night could easily be murder. I didn't say I *knew* it was murder."

"Then be more careful," I

warned him. "You could get yourself in a great deal of trouble by making such a reckless statement, without any facts to back it up."

"But do you honestly think he can come back?"

I said, "No—that's impossible even for a man as learned and resourceful as Harry. However, I believe he might have made certain provisions—taken certain steps—before his death, to make sure that his killer would be apprehended and properly punished."

"Are you sure, Guy? Do you know anything definite you're keeping to yourself?"

"You're very interested, aren't you, Marty? Could it be that you're troubled with a guilty conscience?"

"I'm thinking of Paul Fitzgerald," he said. "He deals in wholesale drugs and could have laid his hands on a large quantity of arsenic if he liked. And I happen to know Paul hated Harry! He claims Harry cheated him on their last deal."

"Paul," I said, "is a liar and a cheat himself if he made such a statement. I know that it was Harry who got cheated by Paul and that Paul lived in mortal fear that Harry would eventually jail him. And that's exactly what he should have done. I advised it."

"It probably wasn't Paul," Marty conceded. "But a good many of the others had a motive too—business or personal. There weren't many people who liked Harry."

"I did," I said abruptly, and picked up some papers at random. I wanted to terminate the conversation. He took the hint and left and I felt angry about him for two or three hours afterwards.

That afternoon, being Harry's business manager, I had to take charge of the funeral arrangements. Sheila would have wanted me to perform that last tragic service, anyway. Sheila was Harry's widow—the girl he never should have married. Naturally, Sheila left everything to my discretion and I made the kind of unostentatious arrangements which I was convinced Harry would have desired. In keeping with the restrictions thus imposed I didn't spend too much.

That evening Sheila and I had dinner together, in the large dining room where Harry had prophesied his death. Before the meal was concluded, in the flickering candlelight, I got up, bent over Sheila and kissed her. We had always been in love and we had both known it. But we were civilized enough to know the meaning of loyalty and self-restraint.

But Harry was dead now and even he wouldn't have expected a lovely young widow to grieve forever. Besides, she needed

someone to take care of the fortune Harry had left her.

Sheila said, "I don't care what people may think or say. I want to marry you as soon as possible, Guy."

"Propriety," I told her, "can go jump in the lake. So can everyone who believes we're too hasty. I love you and I want you. It's as simple as that, my dear."

"We'd better announce it very soon," she said. "Otherwise, they'll say you might have killed Harry to get me. But if we're married at once, then they can't say we're hiding anything."

"Do you honestly believe Harry was murdered, Sheila?" I asked.

"I'm sure of it, my darling. Harry never tripped in his life, either on a stairway in total darkness or in his sedate manner of living. He was sure-footed."

I told her I had the same feeling. We agreed on many other things too, and when I left, our plans were well in order. Out of respect for Harry we would keep it quiet until after the funeral. But at the reading of the will, I intended to make the formal announcement.

Sheila held my hand very firmly as we faced Russel Hicks, who was Harry's attorney. A great many people were present, both those who had been at Harry's dinner party and his servants and non-executive level business employees who rightfully believed they were going to be rewarded for years of faithful service.

There were gasps when Sheila and I revealed our plans and then a surplus of good wishes and hand shaking. Of course I knew that Sheila's position as successor to the major portion of her dead husband's estate had substantially contributed to the good will which surrounded us.

Then Attorney Hicks settled down to his main task—the reading of Harry's will. He read it in a sonorous voice, as though to act it all out for Harry who couldn't have summoned a really impressive gravity of manner no matter how hard he might have tried.

First, the servants and employees were generously taken care of. We all moved to the edge of our chairs with ill-concealed impatience when the important part came. Harry was making good his threat to find and expose his murderer from the grave.

"If," Attorney Hicks quoted from the will, "my death has been established as a natural one by autopsy and every available scientific test, Clauses One, Two and Three, are to be considered null and void and not even read and Clause Four shall constitute my last will and testament. If, however, there is any form of violence attached to my demise, I do order the following to be done.

"FIRST: I appoint my friend and esteemed manager, Mr. Guy Gregson, to enforce and carry out the terms of my will. He shall be my sole executor, and lend to my widow all the comfort possible and all the benefits of his business acumen.

"SECOND: The aforementioned Guy Gregson shall immediately contact private detectives to undertake an investigation of my murder and the expenses of this investigation shall be paid for out of a fund of one million dollars which has been set aside solely for that purpose. As many investigators as Guy Gregson deems advisable shall be employed, and their methods shall not be questioned, and their identities kept a strict secret except to the aforementioned Guy Gregson if, in his considered opinion, they can operate more successfully in secret.

"THIRD: I now set aside the sum of one million dollars which is to be paid to the man who discovers my murderer and convicts him. It is my opinion that such a reward will spur men to their best efforts and with another million available for expenses and fees, enough investigators may be hired to insure that no possibility will be left unexplored, even if at first it may seem trivial.

"FOURTH: All the remainder of my estate is bequeathed to my widow, Sheila Foster Moore with the fond hope that she will never forget me."

Hicks closed the folder. "That's it," he said. "And if there is a murderer among you, I'm convinced that his identity will soon be known."

I lost no time. I instructed Hicks to prepare a copy of the will and to send it to my office. I'd known, from the very first, that the details couldn't be kept a secret, but I hardly counted on what followed.

It was my bad luck that there should be a momentary complete lull in world affairs, and the newspapers made front-page copy of Harry's strange will. For the next two weeks I was literally smothered by a horde of private detectives, and I seriously doubt if more than ten percent of them had licenses or had even remotely considered embracing the profession of private investigator until they had read the newspapers.

Finally, I was able to reach my office with the help of the police, officers who would apparently have been willing to resign from the force if I could have promised them first crack at the job.

I made some order out of the confusion then, because keeping things orderly is more than a fetish with me. It's part of my job. I interviewed the would-be investigators, one at a time. I made notes of their boasted abilities, I took down reference

names and addresses. I summarily dismissed those who were obviously amateurs, inspired only by the rainbow's million dollar end.

The task took me weeks, but by then I had a formidable list. I pruned it with more interviews until I had what I believed to be the ablest group of private investigators in America. These selected individuals I called in again and to each I made the same statement. In the course of the next few days I would nominate the ten or twelve men whom I considered best qualified to handle the job. The applicants who did not hear from me could consider themselves out of the game. I did not intend to have hundreds of incompetent investigators flooding me with reports and phone calls.

My task completed and the orderly process of an investigation launched, I took time out to marry Sheila. It was a well-attended wedding. I think someone told me afterwards that almost a thousand men and women gained admission to the church and another thousand waited in the street outside. Anything or anyone connected with Harry Moore—who was operating from his grave to locate his murderer—was of paramount human interest.

A deluge of spiritualists descended upon Sheila and me until we had to bar the doors against them. I knew Harry well enough to realize that he would have no need of spiritualists or seances to carry out his promise—if it could be carried out at all.

"I am keeping all investigative reports a strict secret," I told Sheila and Attorney Hicks. "There will be no question of collusion or piracy of clues or ideas when we have to pay off. Not one of the detectives I've engaged knows what the other is doing."

"But," Sheila asked, "haven't they found even the remotest vestige of a clue?"

"No," I said. "Nothing at all. And they are spending money quite recklessly. I'm beginning to suspect they are far too lavish with Harry's million dollar fund. However, I'm doing the best I can, under the circumstances."

"Might they not," Sheila asked, "discover something of importance by questioning the wives of the men whom Harry suspected? I should hate to see all that money go to waste."

"They have orders not to report on gossip," I told her. "We want only facts, my dear."

Sheila and I visited Harry's tomb five months to the day after he was killed. We thought it our duty and I offered up a silent prayer for him though I noticed that Sheila was far more interested in inserting a nail file into the ridge of plaster which sealed the crypt. It was hard, not tam-

pered with. Harry was apparently still in his coffin—if that was what she sought to learn.

Of course, a few interesting developments occurred. Martin Evans burst into my office late one afternoon and insisted that I take the detectives off his trail. He was very emphatic and belligerent about it. I had no specific information concerning their interest in him and I told him so. But he found no comfort in my reassurances that he was not a prime suspect in the case, as far as I knew.

"They interfere with my sleep and my work," he complained. "Wherever I go, they watch me. I can't stand it, Guy. I'll go out of my mind if this keeps up."

I sat back, wondering if the main purpose of Harry's scheme had not been to drive his murderer into revealing himself from sheer terror of being found out. I discarded the idea, however, as not being worthy of Harry's intellectual subtlety, and genius for careful, detailed planning.

On the sixth month anniversary of Harry's death, Hicks called me to his office. I found Sheila there, looking very pale and distraught and I went straight to her side.

I said, "If they have the audacity to even hint that you may have killed Harry, I shall give them very good reason to wish they'd kept their thoughts to themselves. It's vicious malice—"

Attorney Hicks cleared his throat then and I realized he was the only other person in the room. He said, "Guy, please sit down."

I dropped into a chair and sat there staring at him. He said, "Harry has won, Guy. He has indicated to me who his murderer must be."

"That," I said, "is utter nonsense. I am the only one who has had access to the reports of the detectives."

"There are no private detectives," Hicks said. "You interviewed hundreds and hired none. I checked. You have transferred moneys from the million dollar fund into your own accounts. There have been no reports—nothing."

I said, "Of course you will be prepared to prove that before I bring suit, Mr. Hicks."

"Oh, yes," he said quite blandly. "Harry authorized you to check, watch and investigate all the other men whom he suspected, but—he suspected you also, Guy. I was ordered, by a codicil you did not see, to investigate you."

I didn't bat an eyelash. My stomach had turned over, but he couldn't have known that. I said, "It is impossible for you to have learned anything against me, Mr. Hicks."

"True," he said. "Except that you could have placed the poison

in his wine in your first thwarted attempt to kill him. And, for the night when he was pushed down the stairs, you had absolutely no alibi. Neither, of course, did some of the others. But you have given yourself away through your failure to do your duty as specified."

"I do not follow you," I said. "I had no reason to kill Harry."

"Sheila was reason enough, and Harry guessed it," Hicks said. "That was why he ordered me to watch the watcher. Meaning, of course—you. It was Harry's firm conviction that with a reward of a million dollars promised to the man who solved the crime and a million dollar fund to cover the expenses of an investigation, the truth was certain to come out.

"But you—if you *were* the murderer—would also realize that, and take steps to make sure that no such investigation would ever be made. That was why Harry gave you every leeway to act as you did."

I said, "There is no proof. As a lawyer, you must realize that."

"But there is," he insisted. "Otherwise, why didn't you hire detectives, and spend the money as Harry wished it to be spent? It was because you couldn't afford to have an investigation made and took steps accordingly. You will have to very carefully explain those things, Guy."

I tried to. I did my very best, but it was no use. The detectives who made the arrest asked me too many searching questions.

After the first admission, there was little point in keeping the rest of it back. Yes—I killed him. I'm sure he had no idea who did it because I pushed him from behind and he luckily broke his neck when he tumbled down the steps so that it was unnecessary for me to finish him.

I could almost see Harry's quiet nod of satisfaction when I signed the confession. In the beginning I may have had some doubts that the vitality of his mind was such that it could operate from beyond the grave—but lately, after those endless and unproductive days in a cell, I am coming to the conclusion that Harry's mind still does exist.

I'm sure, moreover, that everything worked out exactly as Harry had foreseen. If anyone else had killed him, I would have discovered the man. If I were the killer, I would give myself away.

Come to think of it—at the very beginning, when Harry made his strange statement at the dinner, I was the only one present who failed to find it amusing, once the macabre edge of it had worn off. I suppose the man he talked about wouldn't have found it amusing. I most certainly have very little else to be amused about in the few days which are left to me.

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a gentleman for a night

by . . . Octavus Roy Cohen

Jim Hanvey laid great stress on the ancient maxim: "Prod a crook to his own undoing!" And he had a daring way of going about it.

JIM HANVEY was all dressed up and had somewhere to go. He regarded his clothes and the night's mission with profound distaste. Jim viewed his reflection in the mirror with consternation. Tough luck that they should choose him for the fashionable Grunig wedding, when the detective staff of the insurance company boasted so many operatives of slim figures and social grace.

With obvious reluctance Jim departed for New Jersey. The air was unseasonably warm. The wedding was set for nine o'clock, but Jim was supposed to be on the job at seven, which meant that he traveled to New Jersey with the last tired hordes of commuters—most of whom were now staring with amusement at the vast person arrayed in dinner dress when the sun was still shining brightly.

At ten minutes before seven Jim presented himself at the Grunig mansion. The butler stared in amazement at the man-mountain detective.

Like his uniquely irreplaceable contemporary, the late Irvin S. Cobb, the ever youthful Octavus Roy Cohen has become something of a "golden day" legend to three generations of Americans. The years have seen no dimming of his narrative brilliance, and in the mystery story field especially his newest yarns seem quite as sparklingly in step with the times as his stories of forty years ago. And here's his famed Jim Hanvey, in a top-echelon crime saga.

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Mr. Grunig appeared—a slim, nervous, excitable little man who seemed only slightly less startled than his butler at sight of Hanvey. He politely inquired the nature of the big man's visit.

Hanvey tugged at his too-tight collar and explained his mission. He represented the insurance company which had underwritten the safety of the Grunig wedding presents, and had been assigned by that company to see that its interests were protected.

Mr. Grunig was nonplused. "But really—er—Mr.—"

"Jim Hanvey is the name." He presented his credentials. "Better look them over to make sure."

A quick glance satisfied the wealthy father of the bride.

"I hardly think we shall need you, Mr. Hanvey. I have already asked the local police to send me their best detective."

"That's fine, Mr. Grunig. But, you see, we understand that there's going to be pretty near a million dollars' worth of stuff on display tonight, and if any of it should happen to disappear we'd be the ones that'd lose. So we figured one of our own men had better be here!"

"Certainly. I understand your company's viewpoint. But what can you do that our local detective cannot?"

Jim's moonlike face did not betray his amusement. "Nothing much, Mr. Grunig—except the Chief sort of figures I'm personally acquainted with every well-known crook in the country, and if one was to show up and see me here, he'd know better than to try anything."

Mr. Grunig was inclined to argue, so Jim silenced him. "Anyway," he said, "I'm here, and I've either got to stay or else the insurance thing doesn't go. Now—which'll it be?"

"Why, of course, if that's the situation—you'll stay." Mr. Grunig conducted Jim into the huge library. "There," he said, "are the presents."

Jim Hanvey took a single look—and gasped. Accustomed as he was to lavish display, he knew that this surpassed anything else in his experience. Art treasures, silver, gold, jewelry—

"Good grief!" he breathed. "There really *must* be a million dollars' worth here."

"Easily," said Grunig proudly. "That string of pearls alone must be worth a hundred thousand dollars. These presents are mostly from business friends. I'm director in a good many corporations, and—"

"Yeah! I know all about you. They say you're a great guy." Jim walked the length of the table on which the jewelry was displayed. He was profoundly impressed. "I'm glad I came over. A layout like this would attract any high-class, self-respecting crook. I'd better stay pretty close."

"That'll be fine." Mr. Grunig excused himself and walked briskly from the room. The big detective stared after him. Regular guy, apparently, and all excited over the social importance of his daughter's wedding.

Jim wandered through the downstairs rooms, marveling at the magnificence of the home. He was almost at ease by the time the guests started arriving, and then he tried to obliterate himself in a corner with the same success an elephant might have achieved hiding behind a potted palm.

"Billion dollars in fluid assets represented here already," reflected Jim, looking around at the assembled guests, "and I haven't seen a professional crook yet."

At fifteen minutes before nine, some one entered the high-ceilinged reception hall whom Hanvey recognized. A man tall and slim, yet powerfully built; a man of dignified presence, perhaps thirty-five years of age. He was broad of shoulder and slim of hip, and, Hanvey noticed, prematurely gray about the temples.

Jim's eyes curtained slowly; then opened with even more exasperating deliberateness. He rose, waddled across the room, and stood under the archway which separated the reception hall from the library. He waited patiently until the newcomer came close. Then he gave vent to a peculiar clucking noise which attracted the other's attention.

" 'Lo, Tony," said Hanvey.

The face of the newcomer flushed. Yet—in a way—he seemed glad to see the detective. His hand came out in a quick, eager gesture and enclosed Hanvey's outstretched hand.

"How are you, Jim?" said Anthony Darrell.

"Fat and hot and uncomfortable—and hoping you're not the same."

Tony grinned. "Friend of the Grunigs?"

"For one night, Tony." Jim moved his head slowly. "Come in and let me show you something, Tony—something pretty."

Darrell followed as Hanvey led the way to the display of wedding presents. Other guests were there, exclaiming politely and eying the gifts with curiosity.

Jim glanced through sleepy, opaque orbs at his companion. He genuinely liked Tony. Darrell was a gentleman—except for a trifling bad habit of acquiring carefully guarded wealth by methods slightly unorthodox.

"Pretty things, Tony?" he said, with casual geniality.

"Wonderful," said Darrell.

"They belong to the bride and groom, Tony—every last one of them."

"That so?"

"It is indeed. And my company has them insured. *Full*

value. And here's the peculiar angle. We don't aim to pay out any money on these, either."

"I see." The corners of Tony Darrell's lips were no longer twisted quizzically. They were set and firm, and there was a queer whiteness about them. He led Hanvey into a corner.

"You think I'm here to snatch something, eh, Jim?"

Hanvey shrugged his massive shoulders. "I wouldn't say that, Tony. Not that I'd suspect you of anything, Tony—not at all. But you'll have to admit it would be a distressingly queer coincidence if something valuable was suddenly to turn up missing and I should happen to remember that one of the most capable big-time jewel thieves in America was among those present. Isn't that the truth, Tony?"

"It is." Darrell leaned forward and laid a long slender hand on Jim's knee. "You've got me wrong, Jim. But not tonight."

"No? Why not tonight?"

"I've always had a hunch, Jim, that you could tell when a guy was being completely honest with you—and that you've got a real heart hidden somewhere in that three hundred pounds of flesh."

"Two ninety-five, Tony. Don't slander me."

"I'm here tonight," said Darrell slowly, "as a gentlemen. Get that, Jim. And a guest." He passed one hand across his forehead and looked into Jim's expressionless eyes. "Have you seen Miss Grunig, Jim?"

"No, Tony. They didn't take the trouble to introduce us. Do you know her?"

"Yes!" He said it softly, almost reverentially.

Jim's eyes opened wide. "What's the idea, Tony?"

Darrell did not mince words, and his voice came earnestly and sincerely. "Maybe you didn't know, Jim, that this is my home town. I was born and raised here. And no matter what I might have done in other places—I've never pulled anything in this town. I went through grammar and high schools here, Jim, and I had a friend all through school. A couple of grades behind me, but we lived on the same block and were always buddies."

"That so, Tony? Who was he?"

"Not a he, Jim. It was Dorothy Grunig."

Jim whistled softly. "The bride?"

"Exactly." Tony was no longer looking into Jim's face. He was staring at the floor and his strong, nervous fingers were tightly interlaced. "There isn't much else I need to say, Jim. Dot was my first sweetheart—and my only one. Just before I left high school my parents died. I worked for two years and then an uncle sent me to college. Dorothy was out of high school

then, and she and I matriculated in the same class. We went through college together. Took our A.B.'s the same day. She was the only girl I ever cared for. She's the one person in the world —of that sort—I still care for.

"I don't know . . ." He gave a short, bitter laugh. "It sounds funny, Jim. I realize that, but when I got an invitation to her wedding, it sort of shook me up. She doesn't know what I've been. To her, I'm just an old friend. On my honor, Jim—and I guess I've got a little left—I'm here tonight in that guise. Maybe you believe me—maybe you don't. You can check up with Mr. Grunig, if you want to—or with Dorothy. But don't trail me around this house. Don't treat me like a crook."

Jim dropped his hand on the other's shoulder. "It's okay with me, Tony," he said.

"You believe me?"

"Why shouldn't I?"

The house was filling with brilliant, eager guests and the rooms were pervaded with that air of excitement which attaches itself invariably to a wedding. Jim was impressed and, staring at his friend, felt a tightening about the heart.

And then he saw a big man in dinner clothes advancing toward Tony. Even before the man reached Darrell, Jim knew who and what he was, and he moved as swiftly as his ungainly size permitted to Tony's side.

The newcomer was no more at home in a dinner jacket than Jim himself, although his particular suit fitted him well. But there was a professionally aggressive swing to the shoulders, and an uncouth correctness in the set of his vest and tie that gave him dead away. More prominent than anything else were the broad, square-toed shoes.

"Flatfoot!" muttered Jim. "Confound his interfering gall."

Hanvey arrived within earshot, to hear the harsh, strident voice of the local plainclothesman. ". . . and the sooner you clear out, the better."

Tony Darrell's face was a study in anguish.

"But I tell you I'm here by invitation. If you'll just—"

"You don't tell me a thing. You big-time operators ain't nearly so smart as you think you are. I know you, Darrell—and I know you ain't gonna be here five minutes from now."

"Won't you listen to me?"

"No! If you give me any more talk I'll slap a vagrancy charge on you. I'm here to protect these presents—and I know how to do it."

"Hello!" Hanvey's easy, drawling voice broke into the tense scene.

Darrell shot a grateful glance in his direction. The man's face was white and his lips were set

in a straight line. Clenching his fists, he spoke directly to Hanvey.

"I'm glad you came, Jim," he said in an even voice. "Two more minutes and I'd have killed this fool."

"Say! What the—"

"Take it easy, Buddy," Hanvey advised. "What's the sense of both of you gettin' all heated up?"

The square-toed man whirled on Jim. "Just who are you?" he demanded fiercely.

"Name's Hanvey," drawled Jim. "And I reckon we're on the same job here. You're a detective, aren't you?"

The other nodded. "My name's Neil Farron. I'm on the local force. You ain't really Jim Hanvey?"

"Uh-huh."

"Then you ought to know this smooth crook here."

Hanvey grinned. "You mean Mr. Darrell?"

"Yeah, I mean *Mr.* Darrell. I recognized him the minute I walked in the room. I knew what he was here for. It's a come-easy giveaway for an operator like him."

"When I came near just now," said Hanvey mildly, "I heard the way you were talking to my friend, Tony Darrell—and it made me angrier than you might suspect."

Farron stared at him in slack-jawed disbelief. "Your friend?"

"Uh-huh. One of the best friends I've got. I sort of want to suggest that you lay off him. He's got an invitation and he's here to have a good time without any outside interference, understand?"

"I'm here to protect Mr. Grunig," Farron snapped. "And I'm gonna do it. He either gets out and stays out, or he spends the night in jail."

"I'm in charge here," Jim said placidly. "I represent the insurance company. I've got the power to declare all insurance bets off. It's part of the protection clause in the policy. All that'll happen if you raise any howl will be that I'll suggest to Mr. Grunig that he send you back to headquarters. And then, Mr. Farron, you won't get that little piece of change you're counting on the old boy slipping you. Am I right?"

Neil Farron stared. But he knew when he was beaten. "All right!" he snarled, glaring at Darrell. "But don't forget I'm watching you. One move and I'll slough you—no matter what your friend here says."

"Right-o, Farron," smiled Jim. "Any minute you catch Mr. Darrell doing something wrong, you go right ahead. But just you be sure you *catch* him. Get me?"

"Yeah, I get you. And the more I do, the more I wonder how they ever got the idea that you were a detective."

From another room came the

soft strains of the wedding march, and there was a general crowding of guests toward that part of the house.

"Isn't that the tune they come in by, Tony?" asked Hanvey.

Darrell nodded. "Yes, Jim."

They walked off arm in arm, passed through the reception hall, and moved thence into the room where the ceremony was to be held. Jim paused by the door as Tony gripped his hand.

"You're a white man, Jim."

"Thanks, Tony. The same to you."

Darrell edged into the crowd, and just for an instant as the bride entered on the arm of her father, Jim caught sight of his friend's stern, set face. The man was suffering . . . and Jim was glad when he lost Darrell in the crowd.

Meanwhile, Neil Farron had not moved from the library. His large frame was firmly planted by the gift table and he was consumed by bitterness.

Farron's brain worked in only one way. Darrell was a crook, and the table by which he stood was loaded with a million dollars worth of gifts. What would a professional criminal be there for if not to steal? Suddenly it struck him with blinding force that if a robbery should be committed Tony Darrell must inevitably be the fall guy.

Farron was not blessed with a vivid imagination, but his mind worked doggedly in a straight line. How simple—and with a victim ready to hand.

He acted carefully and without any show of haste. The library was empty—save for himself and the wedding gifts. The guests had crowded to another part of the first floor, enthralled by the ceremony.

Farron reached out one big hand and lifted the pearls from the table. He took them as they were, case and all. He glanced around swiftly, shut the long, narrow velvet box and slipped it into his trousers pocket. With studied nonchalance he strolled into the reception hall, past the doors of the room where the wedding ceremony was being performed and then to the kitchen.

Nobody was there. The servants had crowded into the butler's pantry, from which point they could glimpse some of the glory in front of the house. The rear of the mansion was deserted, and Farron knew it would remain so for ten or fifteen minutes longer. He tried three doors before locating the one which led downstairs.

It was the work of a moment to reach the basement and find the furnace. With scrupulous care, Farron opened the door of the furnace, and with a deft motion placed in the fire box the velvet case with its valuable contents. Then he returned to the

first floor, strolled casually back to the library, and, after waiting a moment, walked through the reception hall and stationed himself next to Jim Hanvey.

Farron put his lips close to Hanvey's ear. "Where's Darrell?" he whispered.

Hanvey turned slowly and favored Farron with a look of disgust that made the local detective mince. But Neil Farron was sitting on top of the world. A hundred thousand dollars worth of pearls, a victim made to order, and the delight of crowing over this ponderous, wholly dumb detective from the insurance company!

The ceremony ended. Miss Dorothy Grunig was now Mrs. Oscar Weldon. The orchestral music swelled louder, the guests commenced to chatter, the crowd moved toward the reception hall, a party spirit seemed to descend upon the gathering . . . and Hanvey waddled to a corner and stood with his back against the wall.

Jim looked for Tony Darrell. At first he didn't see him. But a few seconds later, Tony appeared, coming into the room. His face was gray. He stood looking down at Jim and shaking his head.

"I was a fool to come," he said.

"Not so awful much, Tony."

"I was. I thought I'd outgrown all this—this sort of thing. I'm going to leave just as soon as I decently can."

They moved together through the big hall and stood near the library door. And because they were near that door they missed no detail of what took place in the room where the presents were on display.

Mr. Grunig was there, proud and excited. Two or three of his business associates were with him and he was exhibiting the wedding presents. But suddenly his high-pitched voice took on a shrill note and he fairly spun into the reception hall.

"Mr. Hanvey!" he gasped. "The pearls are gone!"

With detective instinct Jim's eyes flashed to the face of Tony Darrell.

"You're sure?" asked Hanvey.

"Good God! Yes! Come, look."

Hanvey started into the room with Grunig. At the door he turned briefly to face Darrell.

"Sorry, Tony," he said softly. "You'll stick around a minute or two, won't you?"

Darrell nodded without speaking. Grunig buzzed around Hanvey, and at the table they were joined by Neil Farron.

"What's wrong?" inquired the local detective heavily.

In sharp, staccato sentences, Grunig explained. Farron grinned triumphantly at Hanvey.

"I told you to give me a free

hand with that crook, Hanvey. But you knew better."

"What crook?" asked Grunig.

"Friend of Hanvey's," said Farron. "He's known as one of the cleverest in the racket. I pointed him out to Hanvey and was going to throw him out—but Jim said no, he was okay for tonight."

"Do you mean," gasped Grunig, "that you two detectives knew that there was a professional criminal in this house—and you let him stay?"

"Hanvey did!"

"What's his name?"

Jim stretched out a pleading hand, but he might as well have tried to dam a waterfall.

"Tony Darrell!" said the detective.

Grunig was aghast. "You don't mean that he—my daughter's friend—is a professional crook?"

"Ask Hanvey," urged Farron.

Jim's big head nodded in affirmation. "Yes, Mr. Grunig—he is. But I'm sure he had nothing to do with the stealing of those pearls."

"How crazy can you get?" sneered Farron.

It was a difficult half-hour which followed, a half-hour of heartbreak for Tony Darrell, of doubt for Jim Hanvey, and of triumph for Neil Farron. Forgetting the fact that he was a hundred thousand dollars richer, Farron acted like a police officer who had simply done his duty.

Farron wanted to take Darrell to headquarters in a patrol car, but Grunig prevented that. The thing was ghastly enough, anyway.

"And, besides, you don't know he's guilty," said Hanvey. "You haven't found the pearls."

"No—I haven't. And I don't expect to. Not when a crook as clever as Darrell plans a job like this well in advance. Anyway, I should worry whether I do or not. That's your insurance company's lookout."

At the jail Hanvey faced Darrell. "How about it, Tony?" he asked. "If you did it—come clean and I'll help you."

The taller man shook his head. "Don't you know I didn't do it, Jim?"

"Yes," came the prompt answer, "I'm sure you didn't. But I had to ask you the question—just for the record."

Near the sergeant's desk, Hanvey met Farron. "Did he confess?" he demanded.

"No," said Hanvey, "he didn't. But you'd hardly expect that, would you?"

"That's right—I wouldn't. I wouldn't expect you to think he stole those pearls, either."

Jim blinked. "I'm stumped, Farron. Honest, I am. I never had a high-class crook double-cross me, and I hate to think Tony Darrell would."

"Do you expect me to believe

that? He's a crook, ain't he? And ain't all crooks crooked?"

"I suppose so." Jim extended his hand. "I put you down for a fool, Farron. I was wrong. How about forgetting it?"

"Fine!" Farron was pleased. "I never did care about grudges. I know you're good in your line, Hanvey. But fellers like Darrell, you gotta treat 'em same as a yegg or a pickpocket."

"I'm afraid you're right."

Farron shuffled his feet. "Will you work with me on the case, Jim?"

"Glad to help any way I can—so count on me, will you?"

Farron waved airily and walked away. Then he reported off duty and made his way to a modest little building where he maintained a three-room apartment. He took off his coat, vest and shirt and threw himself in a lounge chair. He lighted a cigar and stared through the smoke at the twinkling lights of the city.

A feeling of absolute contentment settled over him. The little chat with Hanvey had been the ultimate touch. He and Jim were friends now—and allies.

Farron closed his eyes and speculated upon the future. Those pearls! A hundred thousand dollars, Grunig had said. He'd get them the next morning on the pretext of searching the house. If they happened to surprise him in the act, he'd pretend he'd just found them. If they didn't catch him—and of course they wouldn't—he could hide them.

He'd have to get a real safe hiding place, of course. No bank vault—that was old stuff. Maybe—Farron's hand dropped to the heavy overstuffed cushion of the chair in which he was lounging. He stared raptly for a moment, then his heavy lips expanded into a smile.

"That's it!" he murmured.

Next morning, shortly after ten o'clock, Neil Farron presented himself at the Grunig home, flashed his badge, and announced his intention of searching the house from attic to basement; and then, for the sake of effect, he actually started at the top and worked down.

For the first half-hour, the butler watched with some interest, but as the detective methodically inspected every nook and cranny, the servant lost interest and left Farron on his own, which was precisely what he desired.

Farron reached the basement of the huge house and stood in front of the furnace. When he was sure he was alone, he opened the door and slipped his hand inside. His fingers touched the softness of a velvet box. He glanced around quickly, extracted the box, and slipped it into his pocket.

Ten minutes later he left the

Grunig home. He walked two blocks and hailed a taxi. Keeping one eye on the chauffeur, he crouched down in his seat and glanced inside the box.

The pearls were there, large and pink and glorious. Neil Farron experienced an exultant thrill. Here in his hand was a tiny string of pearls that guaranteed financial safety for life.

He hid the pearls in his apartment, and then waited for three days. Later he heard that Jim Hanvey had searched the Grunig home, but he did not personally see him again.

On the third day after the robbery, two important things happened: Tony Darrell was released from jail on heavy bond. And Detective Neil Farron moved out of his modest three-room apartment.

A moving van backed up to the apartment-house door and took all of Neil Farron's furniture to a warehouse. They gave Farron a receipt, and the heavy-set detective walked to a new place of residence with his heart singing.

Neil Farron was not of the impatient type. He was a plodder and had determined to leave his furniture in storage for at least a year before attempting to dispose of the pearls. Nice little stunt of his to store the furniture, too.

Thereafter matters returned to normal. Tony Darrell went his way—rather worried and not a little sick at heart. Jim Hanvey busied himself on other matters; and Neil Farron reported for duty every day at headquarters, and attended to his routine work with heavy efficiency.

Rewards had been offered for the pearls, just as Jim had predicted. Two thousand dollars were offered by the insurance company and an additional thousand by the bride's father. The general impression around police headquarters was that Tony Darrell had stolen them and that he was too accomplished a crook to be caught.

By the end of the sixth week, Farron himself had almost forgotten the affair. There was nothing in the air to warn him of disaster when he strolled up to the sergeant's desk one night, reported in, and turned away.

"Hey, Farron," the sergeant called. "Heard the news about them Grunig pearls?"

Neil Farron was beset by a presentiment of disaster and was glad that his back was turned at the moment. "What about 'em?" he inquired.

"They was found!" announced the desk sergeant.

Farron's brain was racing. The pearls found? It wasn't possible! And if it were true . . . They must have taken them from his own lounge chair in the warehouse. Things went black before his eyes, but his expression was

placid as he edged closer to the desk.

"Who says them pearls was found?" he inquired.

"Mrs. Weldon. Dorothy Grunig that was. She called up and said to lay off the case."

Farron opened his lips to speak, then closed them with the words unuttered. He walked into the street, where the hot breath of summer struck him like a furnace blast.

He was thoroughly frightened. If it were true that the pearls had been found, he'd better beat it! But suppose . . .

He entered a drugstore and made his way to the telephone booth. He called the Grunig home, knowing that the newlyweds were living there temporarily. The butler's voice answered.

"Is Mrs. Weldon there?" asked Farron.

"Who wishes to speak with her?"

"Police headquarters," answered the man.

A few seconds later, a woman's voice came through the receiver. "Hello! This is Mrs. Weldon."

"This is police headquarters, Mrs. Weldon. I understand you called up today to say that the pearls were found."

"That's true."

Farron mopped his perspiring forehead. "Who found 'em, Mrs. Weldon? Was it Jim Hanvey?"

"I can't tell you."

"Can't tell me? Why not?"

"Because," came the bride's voice, "the necklace was returned to me with the distinct understanding that we drop the case, ask no questions, and divulge no information."

Utterly miserable and badly frightened, Neil Farron placed the receiver on the hook and lurched out of the drugstore.

He knew that there was nothing for him to do but leave town. Then a terrible thought assailed him. Suppose the news were not true? Suppose some clever crook had given Dorothy Grunig a string of imitations and collected the reward? He was tortured by doubt and uncertainty. The more he thought about it, the more certain he became that he must visit the warehouse and satisfy himself that the pearls actually were gone.

Farron walked the streets, worried—afraid to do anything and more afraid to do nothing. Eventually he went to the warehouse. He exhibited his receipt to the man in charge and demanded access to his furniture. The clerk left him alone.

Farron worked silently and swiftly. He moved two or three pieces of furniture and came at length to the overstuffed chair in which the pearls had been hidden. He removed the seat cushion.

And then the heart of Neil Farron sang with joy, for—unless some one had worked with consummate skill—the pearls had not been touched. The stitching was still there, exactly—it seemed—as he had done it. He produced his pocket knife and slit the material. His hand probed beneath the cloth and touched the pearls. He untied them and withdrew them from their hiding place.

Three figures emerged from the gloom: The squat figure of a brother officer, the lean form of Tony Darrell, and, last of all, the mammoth shadow of Jim Hanvey. It was the huge shadow which approached and Hanvey's drawling sleepy voice which spoke. "Thanks for the pearls, Farron," murmured Jim.

"You sure made it easy for us."

And then, in a blinding flash of realization, Neil Farron understood. "Jim," he said brokenly, "didn't you tell Mrs. Weldon to say she had got the pearls back?"

"Uh-huh," smiled Jim, "I sure did."

"Why?" asked Farron weakly.

"Well, to tell you the truth," said Hanvey, "I suspected you of stealing the pearls, but I wasn't sure. I didn't know where they were hidden. So I figured there was nothing for me to do but get a swell detective like you to help me find them!"

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MURDER IN THE HILLS

By T. S. STRIBLING

in the next SAINT

gift from santa claus

by . . . Julian Symons

It seemed to Francis Quarles that Justice should be a little near-sighted on Christmas Eve. So he gently removed her spectacles.

"I WANT to see Santa Claus," said Francis Quarles's nephew Jonathan. "Will he give me a present?"

"I expect so." They stood in the Toy Department of Merridge's among other late shoppers, on Christmas Eve. Children were experimenting with space pistols while their fathers longingly fingered electric trains. Balsa wood boomerangs curved gracefully through the air, monkeys performed trapeze acts over and over again, a woman demonstrator blew balloons out of the most unlikely-looking material.

At one end of the Department a sign said: CHILDREN. ENTER ALADDIN'S CAVE AND GET YOUR PRESENT FROM SANTA CLAUS HIMSELF.

A queue of children went in by the pay desk and came out holding small parcels wrapped in bright paper. Most looked delighted, one or two were snivelling, a small boy with fair hair swung his blue paper parcel by its tinsel string with an air of boredom.

It was a cheerful scene but Sir Wilfred Merridge, who had

Here's a Christmas mystery with quite shining gifts for everyone concerned—including some evildoers who in ordinary circumstances would have been promptly escorted to the nearest police station. But we think you'll agree with Julian Symons that it could, in good conscience, have ended in no other way.

been showing Quarles round the store, looked worried. He began to talk about the thefts at Merridge's.

"They began a fortnight ago as petty shoplifting, but now they've gone far beyond that. At first it was fountain pens, scarves, cigar cutters—that kind of thing. Yesterday we lost a valuable brooch, an expensive bottle of perfume and a diamond-studded wristwatch."

"And you're sure it's someone who works here, not the customers."

"Yes. They were of too regular occurrence for ordinary store thefts. It happens every day. Must be someone on the temporary staff engaged for Christmas. It's not difficult to steal things, if you're reasonably intelligent. What we can't understand—good Lord, what's that?"

"You're dead," said Jonathan Quarles triumphantly. He had pushed into Sir Wilfred's back an oddly-shaped red plastic instrument which made a droning sound when he pressed a button. "Can I have this, Uncle Francis? It's a rocket detonator with atomic flame."

Quarles paid a gratified assistant. Sir Wilfred went on: "What we can't understand is how they sneak the stuff out. I've had four times our usual staff of detectives keeping watch, and they're convinced it's not passed to customer accomplices. And the staff don't go out in the daytime. We've got a cafeteria which everybody uses at this time of year when the lunch hour has to be curtailed. For the last three nights we've asked all the staff to submit to a search before leaving—purely voluntary. We found nothing."

"*When* can I get a present from Santa Claus, Uncle Francis?"

"In a minute. Go and look at the railway trains and see if you can buy a level crossing or signals or something that doesn't cost a small fortune." When Jonathan had rushed away with money in his hand Quarles said: "What's to stop the thief—or thieves—from passing things to other employees in the cafeteria?"

"They could do that, of course. But it still leaves the problem of how they get the stuff out. If there were accomplices among the customers our detectives would have noticed them hanging round one department or another. They've been particularly on the lookout for anything like that."

"Trivial but disturbing," Quarles said. "Just how large were most of the things stolen?"

"They were of small size, almost all of them. The biggest was a pair of solid silver candlesticks. If you're thinking of anything like secret pockets in clothing I can assure you—"

"Nothing like that," Quarles

said absently. "Good heavens, whatever has that nephew of mine latched on to now?"

"Here's something much better than signals and level crossings." Jonathan Quarles took out of a cardboard box a bright green parrot, wound it up and placed it on a counter nearby. The bird immediately began to flap its wings up and down and move along the counter squawking: "I've lost my buttons and braces. Hey, damn your eyes. I've lost my buttons and braces. Hey, damn your eyes."

Jonathan's own eyes were bright with delight. "Isn't it supersonic, Uncle Francis? Can I have it?"

"I take it he's Old John Silver's parrot in 'Treasure Island.' Just the thing to appeal to your grandmother. Ask that lady over there to wrap it up."

"And *can* I see Santa Claus?"

"As soon as you've got that bird wrapped up." He turned again to Sir Wilfred. "Is it true that *everybody* is searched?"

Sir Wilfred, nodded. "Yes. We make no exceptions."

"Are you searched, for example?"

Sir Wilfred went very red. "Of course not. Why should I steal my own property?"

"You wouldn't, naturally. I only wanted to point out that when you said everybody had been searched it wasn't literally true. In the same way your store detectives looked only for customers coming in contact with the staff. I doubt if they thought of—"

"Can I see Santa Claus and get my present now?"

"Yes, you can." Quarles gave Jonathan the purchase price. He paid it at the desk and joined the now dwindling queue. "What kind of things do they get?" Quarles asked.

"Little clockwork toys, cardboard cut-outs, that sort of thing. Unusual value. They cost us very little, but we do it to keep the youngsters happy." And to keep them in the Toy Department, Quarles reflected. Sir Wilfred said impatiently: "You've got nothing practical to suggest, then?"

"I'm not sure. Here he comes." Behind the curtains they heard Jonathan pipe: "Merry Christmas," and the answering boom of Santa Claus: "And a Merry Christmas to you, lad."

Jonathan came out carrying a little box. Behind him came a small fair-haired boy who swung his green paper parcel by its tinsel string with an air of boredom.

"That's the boy," Quarles said. He put a large hand on the youngster's shoulder. "Let's see what Santa Claus has given *you*."

"Let me go." The boy wriggled furiously but Quarles held him comfortably with one hand and tore off the parcel's paper

wrapping to reveal a gleaming cigarette case.

Sir Wilfred gave an outraged exclamation and picked it up. "Solid silver. The little scoundrel."

Jonathan, who had undone his own parcel, said: "That's much better than mine. I've only got a jigsaw puzzle."

The boy suddenly raised his voice to a shout. "Bill, they've got me."

A moment later surprised shoppers in Merridge's saw Santa Claus emerge from behind his curtain and run as quickly as his long red cloak would permit across the room. At the department entrance two unobtrusive men gripped him by the arms.

"It was absurdly simple," Quarles said with a touch of mock modesty. "Probably there were four of them in it. Is that right?" he asked the boy.

"Yes. Bill's wife got a job in Cosmetics and Harry Jones is in Jewelry."

"They stole the things and passed them on to Santa Claus in the cafeteria at lunchtime. He handed them out as presents to this boy—the kind of customer your detectives never noticed coming into contact with the employees. I realized what was happening when I saw him going in three times in a few minutes. Not even your presents are such good value as that."

"Most observant." Sir Wilfred seemed quite overwhelmed. "I don't know how to thank you. Your fee—"

"No fee. I have only one request to make. When you've got the stolen things back, don't make a charge." Quarles released his grip on the fair boy and ran a hand through his nephew's hair. "After all, it *is* Christmas Eve."

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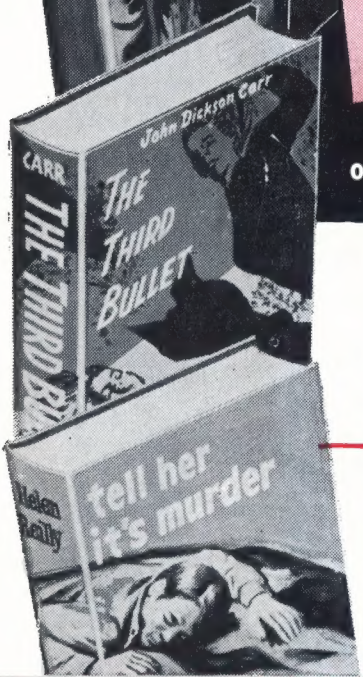

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